

Romans 12:3-5 (NKJV)

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

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

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

So how did your homework go last week? I hope you took my challenge and learned a little about the gift that God has given you.

Last week we looked at verse 3. The essence of what we are told to do is to **see ourselves accurately**. We are to think in such a way that we see ourselves as we are. And Paul started his command with the perspective of Grace.

Paul knew that when we get **that** point right, we then have a point to orient to and from.

When I was a kid I used to walk a couple of hundred yards down to my Uncle George's pond on winter nights. We didn't get much snow, so often the ice on that pond would be like a sheet of glass. I would take a candle with me and I would light it and place it where I thought the middle of the pond was. Then I would ice skate with a continual awareness of where that light was.

That is what Paul's mention of grace is to do for us this morning. It is the orientation point that always keeps us in perspective regarding where we are. If not for the candle of grace, we might think that we have **placed ourselves** in the Christian faith. We might think that our **hard work** is what has caused God to use us in whatever ways we have been used. We might think that we are such an example of Christianity that others ought to be exactly like us. But the candle of Grace reorients us. It causes us to see that this whole thing is not about us. It is all about God. It is not about what **we** have achieved. It is about what **Christ** has achieved. The candle of Grace causes us to see that **it is God** who puts together the church. And every single person He brings in, He brings in by Grace through faith.

We also see that it is **in this grace** that God has dealt out the gifts that He wants in all the various local church bodies.

We begin our trek into verses 4 and 5 this morning from verse three with the candle of Grace in the middle of the pond. And we remember while **we look at all**

of this, that it is all about God's grace, God's decision, God's placement. And as such, only a fool would choose to boast.

So **Principle 1** in our text is- all we have is from grace.

Now let's look at verse 4.

4 For as we have many members in one body,

The **Second Principle** we are going to look at this morning is that the church is a body. Paul used several illustrations to show us about the church of Christ. He used buildings and kingdoms and other things. But probably the idea he used most to illustrate the church is the human body.

Let's look at I Corinthians 12 and see what he says. I will be using this as the expanded text and our text in Romans as more of a summary text. It is always good when we can allow scripture to interpret scripture. We will be doing some of that this morning.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NKJV)

12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?

18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our un-presentable parts have greater modesty,

24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,

25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

And Paul in Ephesians has this to say.

Ephesians 1:22-23 (NKJV)

22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,

23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Now I will be listing several principles about our text that are also taken from these texts.

So the church is like the human body.

Why would he pick the body?

Well first off the body isn't like a circuit board. You can't solder on new believers. It isn't like the part that gets added can just be added willy nilly. The body is an interdependent system. Think about it. Our human bodies start with just a cell and then two cells. And they multiply. And everything about our cells have something in common with the original cells.

Then as the body grows it develops systems that serve the rest of the cells. We have the nervous system that allows feeling and control. We have the respiratory system that provides oxygen. We have the circulatory system that distributes oxygen and removes waste. And none of the cells in the body could exist without those other cells carrying out their functions.

Paul did not choose this illustration by accident. This is how the body of Christ is. We don't add the parts. We don't put the body together. Our Creator does. It is Christ who adds to the body. It is He who puts in the parts to His liking. It is not something that we as humans could pull off. It is way too complicated. It is way too inter-related. We can invite people to Christ, but only Christ can add them to His Church. Only Christ can cause them to fit. It is a wonderful thing. But that is exactly what He does to every believer. That is what He has done to you this morning if you are His child. He has not just saved you as an individual. He has placed you in His body as an integral function of what He is doing.

Now let's look at our text a little more. **but all the members do not have the same function,**

The **third Principle** is that different parts have different functions.

I am borrowing this from John McArthur who quotes his source. I am quoting this from his book.

“A fictitious article published some years ago in the Springfield, Oregon, public school newsletter illustrates this principle very well.

Once upon a time, the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world. So they organized a school.

They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming and flying.

To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming; in fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying, and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his web feet to be badly worn, so that he [became] only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable, so nobody worried about that—except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of his class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make-up work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed "charley horses" from overexertion, and so only got a C in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing classes he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there...”MacArthur New Testament Commentary

Can you see why I quoted this?

Isn't this exactly what we do when we try to make other people be like us, or when we try to be like other people?

I remember when I was in college and was heading up Young Life on the Messiah Campus. I remember trying to recruit freshmen to join our team. I called these people to a very challenging commitment of time. I was gung ho about visiting the high school campus and talking to students there. And I remember wishing that all these recruits would do the same. I wanted them to be like me. But as time went on and I would do stupid thoughtless things, or would completely miss

some detail, or would carelessly offend some person, these staff people would step in and fix the messes I would create. They would minister to the teenagers in ways that I never could. And it was very clear that God was using them. I remember thinking then that I was such a fool. And every time I start thinking other Christians should be like me I get that feeling again. That is me thinking too highly about myself and forgetting that we all have our function. We all have the place we fit. And it isn't the **same** place.

When we try to make other people's Christian lives look exactly like ours, we are violating the body of Christ. That is not how He wants it. And that is not how He set it up. He doesn't want the rabbits swimming. He doesn't want the ducks running. He simply wants us to use the gifts He has given us with everything that is in us, with all diligence. He may want us at times to step outside those areas that we are most comfortable, but for the most part He wants us doing those things that we are created for and re-created for.

It is good that there are as many kinds of **Christians** as there are **needs** in the Christian church. We should never look at others and **look down on them** because they are not drawn to the same kind of service we are. That is wrong and evil and prideful of us. We should do our best to **encourage them** in the ministry that God is calling **them** to.

The **4th Principle** is this- **every function is important**

Now we might get the point that every function is different but miss the point that not only is it different but it is important. There are two common mistakes with the gifts. We can think of gifts too highly and we can think of gifts too lowly. For instance you have allowed me to carry out the preaching here each week. And that is an important task. But it is no more important than the person who spots a need and will not rest until they have attempted to meet it. It is no more important than the person who visits or calls the shut ins to make sure they have companionship and encouragement. You get what I mean here. If all that happened here spiritually was that the **Word was faithfully proclaimed**, even if it were done at a level of excellence that I could never reach, and nothing else were done, what good would that gift be?

It is wrong of us if we devalue the gift that God has given us. It is wrong if we are carrying out a ministry that God has given us to do and we think that **we are nothing** because our gift is less noticed or appears less beneficial than some other gift. That is the world's thinking creeping into our thinking. And it is wrong. Think about your body. Could you really say that my hand is important but my foot isn't? Could you say breathing is important but smelling isn't? That is how

Paul frames the argument. It is absurd to try to place different values on the functioning of the body. It lives as a whole and dies as a whole and cannot be divided up into parts.

That leads to

Principle 5- No function is independent of any other function.

One of the worst things that can happen to the human body is when one of its parts starts acting independently of the rest. Ask anyone who has a heartbeat that is erratic how unnerving that can be. In fact, in the human body it can be life threatening when our members no longer function dependent upon the other members. If your kidneys or liver or lungs do not function along with the other systems, we notice it and recognize the seriousness of that condition.

Well that is how our church is. First we see that our members actually have no sense or meaning apart from the body. If you found a hand out on the middle of the road you would know that that hand will not be building a building or typing on a keyboard any time soon.

The hand has no function if it is not plugged into the body. And that hand is completely dependent on the rest of the body to carry out its function. It needs blood pumping. It needs the eye to see the nail it is about to hit. It needs the elbow and the shoulder to put power behind the swing.

Do you get it that **we are all in that same boat**? Do we **really** get it? This isn't some idea that a man made up. This is what God says. We are not designed to live alone. We can't be like the hand in the middle of the road. God put us together because we need each other. Now you might look around and think, well couldn't God have put me into a better bunch of people? I mean we are a kind of rag tag group after all. But we have a Sovereign God. He didn't make any mistakes. We are all here for a reason and those who are believers need each believer here. We are in this together.

I Cor 14 gives us a bad example of this principle. Evidently Paul had to bring order to the chaotic worship services that the Corinthian church was having. Evidently people would begin speaking in tongues while others may have been prophesying. Others would prophesy but would not sit down when someone else felt they were given a message from the Lord. These people thought that their gifts existed independent from the rest of the church. They had an elevated sense of their importance. There was no interdependence. Well, Paul stepped in and straightened that out. It is no wonder that this is the same church he wrote the love chapter to. Had they regarded themselves properly, from the candle of

grace in the middle of the pond, they would have understood **they were needing** what the others had to provide.

This leads us to **Principle 6- Each function contributes to the whole.**

I Cor 12: 22 says No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

Look at what this is saying. Each member is necessary. Even the parts that are not impressive, that don't even seem to be doing much, if they are carrying out their part, even secretly, are not only important, but necessary. In other words, the whole cannot function without them.

You may have gifts that function in a very quiet way. What you do may never be recognized by the whole body. In fact, they may take what you are offering for granted. They may never give it a thought about the contribution you make. It may seem unappreciated. It may seem unnoticed. But you must consider what this verse says. If it is a gift that God has given to the church through you, and you are carrying it out by faith in Christ, that gift is every bit as necessary as the most visible of gifts which would probably be preaching. In other words, what you are doing which receives little notice is just as necessary as what I am doing which receives lots of notice. **The notice it gets does not determine its necessity.**

God determines its necessity.

I guess what I am saying this morning is be encouraged. You who do the things that are rarely seen, that are rarely appreciated, be encouraged. Our God says they are necessary. And you are in the position to do those things in a way that do not have mixed motives. I could easily preach to receive the "atta boy Jon" from those who listen. I could easily do what I do for mixed motives. But if you get no attention. If what you do is mostly between you and God, you are not nearly so tempted to do what you do for the wrong motive. And our God says that what you are doing is equally necessary.

We need to take this in. We really need to understand and believe this. Every person in this church was given a gift. And every gift is necessary. Every believer in this church is dependent upon you to exercise that gift. If you are too lazy to do it, or too selfish to do it, or too squeamish to do it, the body will suffer. But if you will do it, the body will flourish as a result of it. It will be stronger. It will be more healthy. Those aren't my ideas. This is essentially what Paul is saying.

Every part depends on the other.

People used to often criticize Mike for the way he exercised his gift. We as elders had to consider the criticism. But what we found is that often the criticism was really based on the fact that Mike didn't have all the gifts. And those who had the

gifts that Mike didn't have were often unwilling to use them. So there were ministries that needed to be done but often weren't done. But that wasn't Mike's fault. He didn't have all of the gifts. And no one should have expected him to have them all.

No church is based on the gifts of one person. It is intended to be a combination of the gifts of all the people in that church. So your gift is necessary.

The next principle is **Principle 7**- Every member must be subordinate to the head.

Ephesians 1:22-23 (NKJV)

22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,

23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

If you think about your brain and your head this will all make sense to you.

Suppose when you went home today each of your body parts would do those things that they thought were in their best interest. Maybe your hands would sit in a lotion of hand cream because that made them feel best. And maybe your feet would sit on a feet massager because that made them feel best. And your body chose to sleep because that was easier than doing work. And on and on.

How long would it take to starve to death? Your hands and your feet would say that they had no interest in doing what the stomach wanted. They were busy. Do you get the picture?

The members are only important as they carry out the wishes of the head. And the head is Christ. We can never get the idea that our wishes, our preferences, our ideals, are more important than Christ's will for our lives. Each individual member is an utter fool compared to the wisdom of Christ. We must understand that Christ is our head. It is Christ who **gives meaning** to all the individual members. And only as we carry out **Christ's will** do we have significance and meaning in the body of Christ. What we think is in our best interest is insignificant. It is **mere foolishness** compared to what the head wants. Christ sees what is best for the body and that is what He orders. We must submit to Christ. We must do what He commands. It is only then that we do the body any good. It is only then that each of us as a member of the Body does our part in **building up** the body. Body parts are never given to serve themselves. The body parts are given to serve the whole. And that is what is most fulfilling to the parts and it is what is most healthy for the parts.

And that leads us to

Principle 8- Failure in one part always affects the whole

26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it;

The body is not designed for the parts. The parts are designed for the body. And when one portion suffers, when one part fails, the whole body suffers. Suppose tomorrow you were to prick your finger and get an infection? Would you say, oh, it is just a finger. Who cares? I can do without that finger? If you were to do so you would be a fool. The infection might start in your finger, but it would not take long until your whole body would be in bed suffering. And it could be that the little infection would lead to the death of your body.

That is what we are getting to here. We are all in this together. We live and die together. So if any of our members are being attacked, it is up to the whole body to gird up that member. We must all be concerned. That part is us. That part is linked to our future. That part is a member of our body.

There is simply no room for individualistic thinking in the church. That might be how we are taught to think as Americans, but that is not how Christ taught us to think as Christians.

Every problem in the church is a problem to every member of the body of Christ. We must see it that way. We are not here for ourselves. We are not here to just make sure that we make it to heaven. We are part of a bigger whole. And we need the rest of the members and they need us. We are members of one another as our text tells us. So we must look out for the best interest of the head by looking out for the best interests of our brothers and sisters.

We need to look at this for ourselves. Look around you this morning. Is that really how you see the people in this building this morning? Do you see that you are here for their best interest? Do you see that you have a vested interest in their lives? You do. There is no denying it according to the apostle Paul.

How will that change what we do? How will that change what we say? Will we look out for our brothers and sisters, even when what we say is uncomfortable?

With everything that we looked at this morning, we have got to ask ourselves, how are we doing as a body? How are we doing at looking after the needs and concerns of each other? How much time and effort do we really commit to it? If you did the experiment this week, was it a big change to your life or a little one? If you didn't, why not? I think we need to prayerfully look at this part of our lives. God says that it is really important. We are not free to just view our lives individually, not if the head of the body is Christ. We are not free to bounce around to different churches based on our taste or preference. All of the letters regarding church functioning were written to local churches or individuals. While Christ certainly has a universal church, the directions He gives are to the local

church. This is where the rubber meets the road. This is where people know us and we know them. This is where we cannot hide our weaknesses or sins. This is where people can minister to us as we really are, not as we pretend to be. So the question is, how are we doing. Let's take that question to the Lord this week, and ask- "Christ, as the head of the church, how could I serve you better?" That is a question He will answer.

This seems like a good time to do what is next.

This morning we have handed out a document about church membership. We have become a little sloppy about this aspect of church involvement. If you claim to want membership at this body of Christ what you are really saying is you want the church involved in your life, in your day to day decisions. You want people who care about you to challenge how you conduct your life in your marriage, or your family, or your finances, or your work, basically anything and everything. You are inviting people to be involved and intrude into your decisions with the Word of God. You are saying that what is most important to you is not your own happiness or your own autonomy. What you care most is that, at the end of the day, you please Christ. If that is not what you want I would urge you not to sign that document. But if that is what you want please sign it.

This document serves two purposes. It helps us get current on some housekeeping tasks. We want all of us to understand our standing in the church. So if you see yourself as a member, please read the document and sign it.

This will also help us to hear your confession of Christ and make sure that you understand what salvation is really all about.

Now some of you Brad and I know well enough that we know your confession and will not follow up. But for those who we have never heard your confession, we will follow up to make sure that your confession of faith is based on the reality of Christ. We are doing this because we don't want anyone to slip through the cracks. We don't want anyone to falsely believe they are a Christian but don't really understand what the Gospel is. So we encourage everyone to fill out these papers in a way that reflects your beliefs and your intentions.