

The Mindset of the Work in the Church

The Doctrine of the Church

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I also want to mention that some of you probably have heard this or many of you have probably heard this, not all, that this week I'm beginning a ministry sabbatical, the second time in my 29 years. I took one in 2009 and then this year the plan is to take two months, June into August, and to do ministry sabbatical. It's something that like-minded churches do. I'm gonna read what we've kind of put together as our definition of the sabbatical and description and objectives. I'm just going to read it to you and hope this will be helpful if you're not familiar with this, maybe it'll help you understand what we're talking about.

A ministry sabbatical is a set period of time where a pastor steps back from his regular pastoral duties to rest and also to focus time and energy on other tasks associated with Gospel ministry. This is a quotation from "The Pastor's Soul," Brian Croft, I'm about to read. The intention of a sabbatical is to provide a time of rest, refreshment and renewal of a pastor's soul and of his family with longevity of ministry in mind. The pastoral sabbatical includes deliberate efforts by the pastor to grow, learn, mature and excel all the more in his ministry upon his return. The pastoral sabbatical is distinct from vacation time, when the pastor uses vacation time he's not expected to fulfill ministry obligations. However, during the pastoral sabbatical, the pastor's charged to engage in devotional theological, pastoral and personal reflection and renewal. So the objectives for this sabbatical as I step away, I mean, Pastor Ty will step away from his regular duties to seek a prolonged period of rest. That's the first one. Number 2, after this initial period of rest, you'll seek to gain fresh perspective on the work of pastoral ministry and the state of Providence Church. He'll provide, number 3, pray for and seek wisdom for the future ministries of Providence Church. Number 4, read several books related to the mission and structure of the church. Number 5, spend time working to complete his doctoral ministry project. Number 6, attend other like-minded churches to hear other preachers and to see how they worship. And number 7, meet with a few other experienced pastors to discuss faithful gospel ministry.

So anyway, that's going to begin this Thursday. I'll be at church on Wednesday night, share a little bit more about that during our testimony time but share briefly about that as well, some, maybe some particular things to pray for, but I appreciate and would really covet your prayers for us, that this would be a really productive time and a productive time in the life of the church. We really believe that it's in God's perfect wisdom, he never

makes mistakes, and even with the way that things have unfolded this year, we've been burdened about trying to be more wise in our ministries here, that's why we asked, we sent out the surveys to get your input feedback, to see what we might have gaps in our ministry. We've enlisted Ray Gentry to help us and consult with us and so he's been helping us and you'll be hearing more about the results of those surveys and some of the things we're learning in August when we get Ray's final report. Those things were kind of tabled temporarily as those of you who have seen the prayer request and was mentioned earlier, April Witkowski, Ray's daughter, is very near death. It's possible that she still, we're praying that the Lord will extend her life and help her liver to function but definitely has not been going well over the last week, the last three weeks, but especially the last week. So with that, he's had to set aside things he was doing so that delayed us, of course, and we in the providence of God, we know that's all God's timing is perfect. So be praying for them. But we feel like it's actually going to work nicely. I have some time to really reflect on my own, then we'll get back together and talk about some of the things that we have learned through the survey process and some of his input he's had with us.

So with that said, today we're going to preach again a message in the series on the church. This is actually the 15th message in this topical series, "Doctrine of the Church." We spent five weeks looking at the foundation of the church. We spent three weeks looking at the framework of the church, that is the foundations, the word of God, the framework is, the leadership structure, sound leadership, elders and deacons, and then the last six weeks, we've been looking at the work of the church, including the power for the work. What is the church called to do? And we've seen that basically we've defined that as pursue holiness and pursue peace. Those are the things God wants us to do on a daily basis so that the church is the true living temple of Christ, reflecting his glory in the world. And so we've been talking about the work, we've also talked about the power, the resurrection power of Christ that we need to lay hold of to do the work that we're called to do, and today, in a sense, we might say we're going to talk about the equipment for the work, that is, we're going to look at a passage that talks to us about the importance of spiritual gifts and actually, even more importantly than that, more essential to the work, perhaps even most important tool is to have a spiritual mindset. So the mindset for the work is the title this morning, "The Mindset for the Work of the Church," that is Paul's focus in these verses, Romans 12, verses 3 to 8. We'll read verses, we'll start reading at verse 1 just so we get the context but we're going to focusing in on verses 3 to 8.

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 be transformed by the 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 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.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, as we bow before You and before Your word, we come again aware of our great need of continuing grace. Lord, if it were up to us, we could not understand these things, we could not repent and believe in areas we need to repent and believe, we could not do anything good. We thank You that You've given us Your Spirit to instruct us, to illuminate Your word. We pray that the Spirit would have His way in our hearts and that He would produce more submission to our Savior and more glory in our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So the mindset for the work in the church. This passage, it's instructive to look at how Paul unfolds his message to the Romans. One of the things that when I preached through this book a number of years ago that stood out to me, was that Romans is the fullest description in all of the New Testament of Paul's gospel. He wrote so many epistles, but this one is the fullest package of his doctrine and that's because in the providence of God when Paul wrote Romans, he had never been to Rome. Normally, most of his epistles he's writing to people at churches where he planted them himself, and on the occasion where he's writing to someone, like Colossians, a church he had not been to, other of his associates planted them at his direction. So every church that he writes to has received his gospel, except the church in Rome when he writes to them. He's never had a personal ministry in Rome, and so he gives them the fullness of his gospel. We can be thankful to God for his providence in allowing Paul to write this letter before Paul had ever been there so we get this fullest, most glorious picture of the gospel that we have in Romans.

The first 11 chapters, soaring, glorious portrayal of all that God has done for us in Christ. The gospel begins with our great need of grace, how we are all hopeless and helpless, whether Gentile or Jew, all are condemned under the law. And so the first three chapters focuses on that, then at the end of chapter 3, the turning point happens and the gospel is unveiled for us in chapter 3, verse 21 to 31, and we see that the gospel is justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, those who were hopeless and helpless. God has made a way by revealing righteousness from him. He makes us righteous. He saves us. Because of his work, the work of Christ, he gives to us something outside of ourselves, a gift, the gift of salvation. Then he explains in chapters 4 and 5 that this is exactly what we should have expected had we been reading our Old Testaments carefully. This is what was promised as we look at the way the Old Testament unfolded. Chapter 6, he speaks about our sanctification, the power of grace at work in the lives of believers. Chapters 9 to 11, he deals with the mystery of election, the wonder of God's sovereignty, and yet human responsibility, these two doctrines held together in an infinite beautiful way. And having completed all of that, he comes to this moment of worship and adoration, doxology in chapter 11, verse 33 to 36. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the

wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments, unfathomable His ways; for who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor, or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever, amen."

So he he's given the whole gospel and it's resulted in Paul's glorious praise to God, and now he turns to practice. How do you live out a life worthy of all that God has done for you? How do you respond as Christians, as believers in your life? And so chapter 12 provides the hinge. Verses 1 and 2, which we looked at a few weeks back, explains that the way that you turn doctrine into practice is with the hinge of worship. You learn to praise God and to worship him directly and to live your life as a priest, someone devoted to worship every moment of every day. You offer sacrifices by dying to your own lusts and your own desires, and through the power of Christ offering to him your life in holiness. That's the ultimate of worship, to to be offering daily moment by moment, sacrifices to God. So he says this is what it's all about, be completely devoted to God. That is your calling. You and I are priests. That's what we looked at three weeks ago. That is our identity. That is our calling, to live lives devoted to God, devoted to worship no matter what we're doing, what we're really doing is worshipping God.

Now, that said, he then is going to continue to get practical and say, what does this look like in life? And so it's instructive that the very next thing he goes to is the mindset. Now think about it. The first two verses he's been saying to live out all that God has done in your life, you need to to develop a vertical focus in your life. You need to always be living before the face of God, always be mindful of God and what he's done for you in Christ, live continually with eyes set on the Lord. But if you're going to fulfill all that he's called you to do, it is not merely just to be heavenly minded, it's also to be doing earthly good and so he turns to the horizontal in verse 3, just how do you live in relation to other people? And he deals with this issue of a spiritual mindset. The mind of someone who has truly been saved and is allowing their mind to be renewed, to be being saved, as it were, by the power of God. This is what he says is essential if we are to build the church, if we are to be about the work that God has called us to, living lives of worship, helping one another to pursue holiness and peace. We have to be people who cultivate a right way of thinking, particularly about ourselves. That's the focus.

So what I want us to do as we unpack this, I think the text flows nicely in three outline points today. First of all, I want us to note the exhortation that we have in this passage. Then we'll look at the explanation. And then we're going to look at the application. So exhortation, explanation, application. Those are our three points.

The exhortation in verse 3 is clear and emphatic. This is really the "what" of the message. What are you called to do? What is it God wants us to do when we think about our relationships with one another? And essentially he says in verse 3, he gives us instruction, don't think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think. He says, "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." Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. He says at

first negatively and then positively, don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but think so as to have sound judgment. Don't think more highly, that's the tendency, but think so as to have sound judgment. He doesn't say here to think lowly of yourself, he says to think rightly of yourself. Sound judgment.

So the question is, how do you see yourself? What is your mindset as you relate to others? How do you see yourself in relation to your brothers and sisters in Christ? This, Paul says, is a fundamental key issue that we must address in our lives if we are to live out the gospel. It's not just living lives of worship, it's living lives of love, you love God and you love your neighbor. So he's turning now to how we love our neighbors and three subpoints under this exhortation that I want to share as we try to unpack this. So the point is exhortation. The exhortation is don't think more of yourself than you ought, but three things that I want to note about the exhortation.

The first is the authority. This is 1A, the authority of this exhortation. When Paul says "for through the grace given to me, I say," it's a very important lead-in to this instruction. For Paul to say "through the grace given to me" is essentially like a formula to say "on the basis of my apostolic authority." Let me show you this in chapter 1, verse 5, Paul in introducing the letter says, "through whom," verse 5, chapter 1, "through whom we have received," we have received, "grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake." He's saying, "Listen Romans, I'm writing to you and I want you to know who's writing, someone who has received grace and apostleship. The grace that God has been given to me is to make me an apostle to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles. I'm the apostle to the Gentiles." He's saying, "God has set me apart for this work." He's appealing to his authority.

He does the same thing in chapter 15 near the end of the book. He says in chapter 15, verse 15, "But I have written very boldly to you on some point so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God." Look at what he says next, "The grace that was given me from God," verse 16, "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles." Ministering as a priest, the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." "The grace given to me" is a formula of saying "the grace that God has given to me to be an apostle." He's saying "on the basis of my apostolic authority, I am saying what I'm about to say." He makes this forceful and emphatic.

He's calling us to listen up, was calling the Roman Christians to and he's doing the same to us. That's the authority of the exhortation. The second issue, though, that we need to see is the specificity of this exhortation. When he says, "I say to everyone among you," I'm reading the New American Standard, "I say to everyone among you," that is, "I say to each individual among you," and he uses a kind of a unique structure that he doesn't use other places. "I say to those who are being among you, who are," the idea is, "I am speaking to every individual among you." Now it's interesting, he's going to talk about the problem of pride and he seems to understand that we need to understand that we need to be under authority here, that's one of the best things to destroy pride is submission to authority. So he starts with authority, but then the specificity. He understands that you

and I, when we see something like this, come up, our tendency is to think, "Oh, I'm so glad that So-and-so is about to hear this message. They really need this." And praying, "Lord, thank You that You're going to give this message to them." But he's saying, "I am talking to you." Paul says, "With all of my apostolic authority, I am talking to each individual among you right now." Every one of us.

So the authority, the specificity of this exhortation and then the urgency of the exhortation. I mentioned the placement, it's right there after at the very beginning of how you make the gospel apply to life, right after those first two verses this is what he turns to, "Live your life, a life of worship and now let me tell you, you've got to make sure you guard the way you think about yourself among other Christians." Right up front, we need to deal with this, Paul says.

So the placement in the book shows the urgency, but then even more, the emphasis of the words he uses. It doesn't come through completely well in English. It does better in some translations than others, but not quite the full force. When he says "for the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you," he uses a Greek verb four times in this passage. Now, twice he puts a prefix on it. It's the verb *phronain* which means "to think." It's a special word for thinking, though, that speaks more of a whole personed thought process. It speaks of a mindset, *phroneo*, the verb. And so he uses it four times in the passage. First of all, when he says, "I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself," here he puts the prefix on it. It's *hyperphroneo*, *hyperphronain*, that basically means. *hyper* we get our English word *hyper* is a transliteration from *hyper* in Greek. It means over, above and beyond. He said, "I'm telling you, through the grace given to me not to think over, above and beyond about yourself." But it's that same verb *phroneo*, not to think more highly of yourself than he ought to think, second time he uses the same word, *phorneo*.

But look at right after that, but to think so as to have sound judgment. Sound judgment is actually the word *phorneo* again. It means sound thinking. The New American Standard and the other translations all translate it different than thinking because it's not the way we talk. You're, you know, sound, I need to have sound thinking, you think sound judgment. But it's the same word. It also has a prefix here, though that speaks of a saved mind, a sane mind. Actually comes from the word for salvation, *sozo* plus *phorneo*, which means a saved mind but tended to mean in its application a sound mind, a sane mind. The implication is we have a tendency to think in ways that are insane and we need to be called out of our insanity to sanity, and he's making that statement to every single one among us because you and I all have these tendencies toward insanity. What is insanity? Insanity is to think so highly of yourself. In particular, to think highly of yourself in relationship to other people.

It's interesting, he doesn't say think lowly of yourself. There are other verses in the New Testament that talk about that. To be lowly minded is a good thing, but here Paul's focus isn't to say that, his focus is to say this, "Think rightly about yourself." Our tendency is to think too highly of ourselves, especially as it relates to others. Pride is such a pressing, continual enemy. Charles Spurgeon said this, "The demon of pride was born with us and

it will not die one hour before we do." Godly Christians have wrestled with pride and they've known it's a lifelong battle; as he said, it won't end until we die.

And so Paul is affirming that, "I want to say on the basis of my apostolic authority to every single one of you, think about yourself as it relates to this issue, not other people. Think about yourself. Do I think more highly of myself than I ought to think?" I need to labor and if I'm not working on it, by definition you are. It's kind of like what he says in Romans 12:2, if you're not being transformed by the renewing of your mind, guess what? You're being conformed to the world. The world is exerting a continual conforming pressure, and the world is all about me. That's what the world says. It's all about you. It's all about me. It's all about the individual. And unless we're being transformed by the power of God's word, the Spirit of Christ, we will be like the world. And so Paul is saying, "Listen, you have to aggressively address this issue in your life."

It's interesting pride has a way of hiding itself, too, and we can think we're humble because we have the affectation of humility. We say things about ourselves, so I'm the chief of sinners, we quote Paul, but when someone confronts us with a real sin, that's when we see if we're really humble. Are you quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger? Well, then you're humble. But if you're defensive and resentful of any correction, then you're not humble. Spurgeon says this in another place in one of his sermons, he says, "Pride has 10,000 shapes. It is not always that stiff and starched gentleman that you picture in your mind. It is a vile, creeping, insinuating thing that will twist itself like a serpent into our hearts. It will talk of humility and pray on about being dust and ashes. I have known men to talk about their corruption most marvelously, pretending to be all humility, while at the same time they were the proudest wretches that could be found this side of the gulf of separation." Such is the evil and ugliness of pride. It's a master of disguise. Talking about humility is not humility. Humility is demonstrated in life, in the way we think about others and respond to others.

And so Paul knows this is something we all are desperately in need of. This exhortation, "stop thinking so highly of yourselves," all of us need to hear these words. That's the exhortation, and well in the second part is, but to think so as to have sound judgment, that is a saved mind, a sane mind, to be thinking like a saved person, to see things as they are. You know, insanity basically you don't understand reality, you disconnect, a break from reality. That's the definition of insanity or one of the definitions of insanity. The sane mind is one that sees reality as it truly is, and the only way you and I can see reality as it truly is, is to have the mind of Christ and the word of God transforming the way we think and that's what the exhortation is.

Labor at your mindset. That's what we're called to do. To think as Christians, to think as saved people, to think rightly about ourselves in relation to others. That's the exhortation. Secondly, we come to the explanation. He turns from what to why. That's what he does as we move on into the end of verse 3, all the way through verse 5. He's basically giving reasons why we shouldn't think so highly of ourselves. It's interesting if you really look at this carefully, it's really quite surprising what Paul does here because if you think about it, think about the exhortation, "don't think so highly of yourself in relation to other

people." Now, how would you, if you were just making your own outline in your mind, where would you go next? To explain why people shouldn't do that. I don't know about you, but I would tend to go to we're all the same. Don't think more highly of yourself than we ought because we're all the same and we're all equal before God. Those things are true and the Bible talks about them other places. There's neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free. All are one in Christ. It talks about that in other places, but that's not what Paul does here. To help us have a saved mind as it relates to how we see one another, do you know what he basically does? He doesn't say we're all the same, we're all equal, he says this, "Don't think too highly of yourself in relation to others because we are also very different." That's what he's going to say. And it is counter-intuitive, as Scripture also often is. And he's going to say we're also very different because we all have different gifts, we all have different measures of faith, we all have different functions, and all of that is a result of the sovereignty of God. So all that you are is what God has made you. Nothing more, nothing less. And when you understand that he's made you each unique and distinct, then you understand he's made everyone else unique and distinct. Stop judging one another by yourself as the standard. That's what he's saying.

You and I naturally tend to think the way we see things is the way everyone ought to see things. Is that not true? Don't you feel like if you just let me, let me be king for a day, I could fix the whole mess? And you always like to talk to other people who agree with you at least on 90% of the stuff because you're like, "Yeah, we we could fix this." We couldn't really because we wouldn't agree on all of it, we would end up fighting as we were working on it. But we feel that way, we think that if we...and so what we do as Christians, remember we have remaining sin, God's given us a new nature, but we still have remaining sin and pride is still in our flesh, and so we tend to go through life and we see things happen, we see things, we react a certain way, we have a certain perspective on an issue and we wonder why our brother, or sister doesn't see it the same way. We wonder why they don't feel the same urgency about this issue as I do. They don't feel the appropriate level of consternation about this problem as I do, and we judge them and we think less of them. But if we understood that God's made us all different and distinct because we all need to have our individual unique function in the body of Christ, we'd stop looking at each other with condemning attitudes. We'd celebrate the diversity, the spiritual diversity, even in the body of Christ.

Now there are other places that talk about our unity. He's going to talk, he does talk about unity here too but his main focus is on diversity. Not ethnic diversity or socioeconomic diversity, but on spiritual diversity and God's authority in making us the way he's made us. So there's three subpoints here I want us to look at. We're on explanation and he basically says, he's answering the question, "Why should you not think more highly of yourself?" First is diversity, because of the diversity of the body of Christ and he emphasizes this first subpoint 2A, diversity, in the text. He says, first of all, in verse 3, "God is allotted to each a measure of faith." And there's some disagreement about how to interpret this, but I think context really nails this. Some folks think it's not emphasizing the distinction as much in this point as in the other points. I think it's emphasizing it here too because of the keyword "allotted." I'm reading the New American Standard. The ESV says "assigned." King James says "dealt to each a measure of faith." God has allotted to

each a measure of faith. Think so as to have sound judgment. God has allotted to each a measure of faith. Each one among you that Paul is talking to, each one among us that Paul is talking to, all of us individually he says, "Look, you have been allotted a measure of faith," and the word allotted is used in the New Testament to have a whole and to divide it up into parts and distribute it. The emphasis is on the sovereignty of the one distributing.

And so what he's saying is God has given to each a measure of faith and we don't have all the same measure of faith. We have the faith God has given us. In fact, faith is a gift. Ephesians 2:8 and 9, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that," that is, faith, "that is not of yourselves, but is a gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no man should boast." You read through the gospels and you see Jesus constantly commenting on the different levels of faith, he says. "Oh ye of little faith." Or he says to the Syrophenician woman, "Woman, your faith is great." Remember that when she holds on to him, even after he keeps kind of pushing her away in his loving, sovereign, electing purpose to draw her, it looks like he's pushing her but he's drawing her. He says, "O woman, your faith is great." Or to the Roman centurion he says when he hears the centurion say, "Don't trouble yourself by coming to my house. I too am a man under authority. I say to this man go and he goes. This man coming and he comes. So just say the word, Lord, and I know my servant will be healed." Jesus steps back and says, "Behold, I've not seen such faith in all of Israel. Great is his faith." But faith is a gift. The faith that you have is a gift of, as Paul said in verse 36, "for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things." If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you believe because you've been given the gift of faith you've been given eyes to see and ears to hear. So praise God for that. If you haven't yet believed, plead with God to give you the gift of faith because he'll give it to everyone who looks to him. Your desire for it is evidence that he's working in you that gift in itself.

So the diversity of faith. We're still under two. Why shouldn't you be thinking more highly of yourself? Because look how different we are, how diverse we are in our faith. But then secondly, this is 2A2, if you're counting, we have different functions. Verse 4, "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function." We're all various members in the body, he uses the metaphor of the physical bodies and says we're all unique members of that body and each of us has a different function, that is, a different practice, a different duty, a different job. Not only do we have different measures of faith, we have different jobs. Think about your own body, how different the jobs, you know, your pinkie. The pinkie doesn't seem to be that important, but if you lose your pinkie, you know, Lord forbid but if you did, you would realize how important it is to have a pinkie, right? And I know as I get older and start having pain in my joints, can some of you guys relate to that? You're like is this arthritis, what's happening? This hurts like crazy. Why? You realize, hey, it's really nice to have those hands work like they're supposed to when you need them. Your big toe, one of the least glamorous body parts right? Some of us keep our big toes hidden for good reason, but we don't want to go without them. You need it to stand to walk. Every part of our bodies, God has put them together with such exquisite genius and he's saying, "Look, we all have different functions so stop judging each other as if you all had the same

function." Paul says basically the same thing in 1 Corinthians 12, he uses the same metaphor. He talks about gifts of the Spirit and he says we're all many members in one body. We've all been placed there as God chose. And don't don't judge the other body parts. Like if you're an eye, why are you looking down on the finger? Or your hand, why are you looking down on the foot? You need both. You're different. You do different things. Don't judge one another by the standard of what a good hand should be.

So we have different functions and we have different gifts. That's what he says in verse 6, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." Different distinct gifts. So don't think of yourself more highly because we are all so very different. Different spiritual gifts. He's going to list seven here in verses 6 to 8. There are others in 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4. You each have different gifts. The Lord has in his sovereign infinite wisdom has made us all so different and distinct. He loves to make unique people. Every one of us are unique. I mean, there's no two people exactly alike. Isn't it amazing when you think about this. I actually looked this up to be sure of this. You've heard the saying that there are no two snowflakes are exactly alike. I looked it up and found out this week that the Library of Congress, that they say that every year they estimate, scientists estimate that we have one septillion snowflakes fall in the world. Septillion, I had to look this up too, is a trillion, now think about this, a trillion is 1 and 9 zeros, right? Septillion is a trillion trillions. Think of a trillion, how big that is. Now have a trillion of those. That's how many snowflakes fall. Scientists are unanimous on the fact that the odds of finding two snowflakes alike is zero. Now think about a God that would make something like snow and not just make it with cookie cutters. Would you do that? I mean, that kind of uniqueness and diversity? I don't understand that. I mean, let's just put them through one little funnel and then we can be done with that. No, our God is infinite and he makes each snowflake exactly like he wants it. He makes Christians the same way. He makes us unique, and think about it, when you get to know one another, we see that, don't we, we see how different we are. Different aptitudes, abilities naturally, different experiences, different family environments that we've been raised in, different levels of education, different things that we've been exposed to, different illnesses, different trials, different challenges, different gifts, different measures of faith and different functions in the body of Christ.

God glories in making diversity and so we should learn to celebrate that in the most biblical way. In fact, our problem is we'd like, I said we tried to judge one another. Paul actually deals with this in chapter 14, verse 1, if you just turn over to chapter 14, verse 1. He's talking about the issue of principles of conscience and he says, "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions." You end up with an issue, he's talking about gray areas, things like, you know, whether you drink or not, how you celebrate the Sabbath, other things that are gray areas the Bible doesn't clearly define, he says we have a tendency to look at someone else and judge them by our standard and he says in verse 4, "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand." You judge your brother or sister because you look at what God has told you to do, how God has made you, and Paul says stop judging your brother. Now he's not saying, other places say when your brother sins, go to him. Yes, it does say that, we are to

evaluate each other's fruit and help one another so there are other passages that speak to that, the Bible is a perfect repository of truth with balancing truths that we need to bring always to the table. But here it's saying we have a tendency to think that whatever we think and whatever conviction we have is what everybody else ought to have and the issue really is are you obeying your Master and is your brother or sister obeying his?

So this explanation basically is diversity but then authority, implicitly in this and explicitly as he says in verse 3, "God has allotted to each a measure of faith, we, who are many, are one body in Christ," verse 5. So implicit is the authority of God. God has given the measure of faith, God has given you your function, God has given you your gifts. In fact, let me just take you to 1 Corinthians for a moment and see this. 1 Corinthians 4:7." The Corinthians also had a problem of looking down on one another and Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:7, "For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive?" Now think about that. What do you have that you did not receive? What did you bring to the table on your own? Answer: nothing. Even the energy that you have to do the things you do is given to you by God, the exposure, the training that you received, even though there is a measure of your faith where you take advantage of it, yes, there is and that's part of what's going to result in rewards in heaven which are going to be different and distinct, we're not going to have the same stuff in heaven either. So listen, think about it. I was talking to someone about this recently, in heaven we're going to have different levels of responsibility but in heaven there will be no envy. In heaven there will be no arrogance. So those of us who have less than others will be rejoicing in God's perfect wisdom in giving them more and giving us less. God is not a Communist, basically.

Now there's a place where we're supposed to make sure everyone has enough, the Bible talks about that, but God is sovereign and free to do what he wants to do and he gives each of us what he wants us to have, and therefore there is no glory or boasting in what you have and what I have. Zero. There's just the giving in glory to God and celebrating the unique contributions of each brother and sister in Christ because we each are there for a perfect divinely ordained function and purpose.

Turn over to chapter 12 for just a minute and I want to show you this in chapter 12. 1 Corinthians 12:7, "to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." He's talking about spiritual gifts. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good, it's to bless the whole body. Look at verse 11, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." That is, the Spirit sovereignly decides where the gifts go. Look at verse 18, "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired." You see, this is not, we don't bring anything to the table, we don't decide how it's distributed, it's all of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In fact, Ephesians 4 talks about Jesus gives gifts. So the Father gives gifts, the Son gives gifts, the Spirit gives gifts, that is, they all give gifts in coordination.

So that's the authority of God but when we understand the authority of God, then there's no room for pride, and then the third subpoint under explanation is unity. Back to

Romans 12, he does talk about unity. Verse 5, "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." That is, we are each gifts to one another is what he's saying. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are God's gift to you. I remember hearing a pastor talk one time about, it was a minister's conference so pastors sometimes will share things that aren't necessarily, they wouldn't necessarily say from the pulpit. So I'm saying this, that he said it not me. Okay? No, but he was saying that there was this particular church member that was really difficult and had been difficult and he was dealing with him and dealing with him and dealing with him, and that he in praying about the situation basically kind of like Paul with a thorn in the flesh, "O Lord, take the thorn away! You know, take this person away," almost is what he's praying and the Lord hit him with this particular thought. As he's thinking biblically, he just came to this understanding. "Wait a minute, the body is given, every person is a gift," and he realized that this person, this difficult person was, this is what he said, "An expression of God's love for me. I need some rubbing, some sandpaper." Even though this person may have some issues that need to be addressed, yes, they do but, you see, when you see it in the way the Bible sees it, how that transforms our perspective then we can actually joyfully interact with people who are difficult, lovingly speak the truth in love, be then useful to God who will grant them repentance if he chooses, and will at the same time rub off all of our rough edges. This is what God loves to do, he uses even our weaknesses to help one another. They're prescription made for one another. So great is God. That's amazing. I mean, he's got things working in every single direction and it's all happening perfectly like clockwork even though it doesn't look like it to you and me because we don't see the big picture. We're constantly thinking, "Uh-oh, everything's going to pot." And God's like, "No, it's not. Right on schedule."

So the authority of God and the unity of the body, thirdly, the application. We stopped at the exhortation, don't think more highly of yourself than you ought but so as to have sound judgment, with the explanation why, because the diversity and the authority and the unity. The application. Verses 6 to 8, "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." Seven gifts he lists here. I don't have time to really do an extensive discussion of spiritual gifts, we'll do that another time, but essentially I think these, I agree with some who see in here something of some kind of a motivational explanation of spiritual gifts, that these gifts seem to be gifts that spur people into ministry and action. When you look at them, they're different than the list in 1 Corinthians 12 which is the other full list, and I think, our church, we have the position that many of the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 have ceased, the sign gifts are no longer necessary, they were given to authenticate Scripture, but there are a number of gifts there that still are in action and here these certainly are and God is giving gifts to his church clearly. But if you look at these, these seem to describe how a person is wired spiritually that will motivate them to get involved in service.

Like prophecy, I think the modern application of the gift of prophecy is something more about seeing things in light of God's revelation and being able to apply God's truth to

specific circumstances, and to see it really black-and-white; that we need in the body people who see things as black-and-white. Now the first one prophecy has to do so according to the proportion of his faith, and actually it says according to the proportion of the faith. I think it means they're to see things in accordance with the faith, sound doctrine. But basically that's all I can say about that. So they see something, they see it's wrong, they want to make it right.

Service in his servings. Servants, the gift of service sees practical needs and is motivated to want to address them, meet them. Let's meet these needs.

Teacher, the gift of teaching, wants to explain and expound upon the previous revelation that God has given. They have the word of God, they want to teach the word of God, they want to explain the word of God.

Exhortation, they want to, it has the idea of calling someone, coming alongside someone and supporting them and leading them forward, calling them to follow you as you follow Christ.

Giving sees real tangible needs and wants to meet them, particularly financial needs or needs of resources.

He who leads with diligence, they see how things need to happen so that the body can function correctly in a situation, sometimes called the gift of administration.

Mercy with cheerfulness. The gift of mercy sees agony and pain and feels, it doesn't just want to meet the need, it wants to feel and suffer with the person who's suffering. That's a very brief description.

I've used this illustration before and I think it's helpful of a dinner party. Some of you have been here for a while, you remember I've probably used this 8 or 9 years ago, maybe only 4 or 5 years ago. Patty and I sometimes disagree about how recently I've used illustrations. She underestimates horribly the time. No, but seriously, a dinner party. Imagine the seven spiritual gifts, there's eight people there and the one person carrying the platter, we don't know what their spiritual gift is but the other seven gifts are around the table. And one person is bringing the food in and they drop the platter with all the food, not just the main dish but the whole thing. It was one of these beautiful dishes that's laid out for everything just to be right there. The dish falls on the floor. The dinner is ruined. How do the seven gifts respond? Well, the gift of prophecy says something like, "You know, you really need to be more careful. You weren't paying attention to what you were doing." The gift of teaching says, "I think really what was going on was that you had it imbalanced. You've got to have, the weight's got to be distributed more correctly. This is how you need to do that next time." The gift of exhortation says, "Listen, it's okay. It was a wonderful dinner. We'll do it again next time. In fact, don't worry about that." You know, trying to encourage the person. The gift of giving is on the phone calling Domino's and using their credit card, "And I'll replace the platter, by the way, too." The gift of administration is saying, "Bill, if you'll get a mop, Sally, if you'll get a

broom," and they're directing the clean-up project. The gift of mercy is saying, "Oh, I know this, but you feel so bad. Don't. I understand, this is so awful when things like this happen. I'm so sorry." That's what they're saying. And the person with the gift of service has already got the whole thing cleaned up.

You see, these gifts are like the way God wires us to see needs and to move toward them. He's given us different ways of seeing things and then you blend the fact that we have, we're supposed to cultivate all of these gifts over time but the idea is you have one main gift of these and if you do, find it and use it. The application is know your gift and use it to serve others and appreciate other's gifts. That's really the two application points: know your gift and use it, and appreciate other's gifts. How do you know your gift? There's people that take spiritual gifts tests. I'm not saying that's really a bad thing. I think it's just more, though, how are you wired spiritually when you see needs? Move toward them. Try to help. If you think you may have the gift of teaching, work on study, try to grow in your knowledge, see if God blesses that. You may not have the gift of teaching and he'll show you that as you try. You may have the gift of exhortation. You may instead have the gift of mercy.

Use your gifts and what the Lord wants us to do, he's saying, "Listen, don't think more highly of yourself than you ought and don't compare yourself to one another. You're each individually uniquely wired by God sovereignly to function as he has intended. Get to work." That's how you don't think more highly of yourself than you ought, you're staying busy serving for the glory of God, and as you serve for the glory of God, then you see other people with gifts and you say, "Man, I could never do what you just did. I would never. I didn't even see that." Praise God. And then all of us, then, become a little bit more like each other which means with spiritual gifts we all become a little bit more like Jesus who had all of the gifts in perfection. That's what God has called us to.

So we need to be about the work. The work is pursue peace, pursue holiness. Do it by not thinking more highly of yourself than you ought. Celebrate the diversity that God has given and get to work.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we're so grateful to You for Your love and Your grace, Your perfect wisdom. Make us more humble. Make us more patient. Make us more, help us think with sane minds about ourselves. None of us is indispensable, Lord, but we're all important because You made us, every one of us who belongs to Jesus. Thank You, Lord. Make us more fruitful, make us more faithful and bring more glory to Your Son. We pray in His name. Amen.