

USING YOUR GIFTS

Text: Romans 12:3-8

Belgic Confession Art 28a

Readings: 1 Cor 12:12-31; Eph 4:1-16

Theme and purpose: To explain the picture of the church as a body with many members and to urge you to use your gifts for benefit of the rest of the body.

God has made our bodies in a remarkable way. You have 600 muscles in your body and they make up 40% of your body weight. There are different types of muscles - some are flat, others are triangular and others are shaped in a circle. All of them are connected to your brain by many nerves. Your brain tells your muscles what to do, and your muscles move your bones, which means you can move your fingers and toes and arms and legs.

Our muscles are only one part of our bodies. We are made up of many different parts but all these parts are inter-connected and they all work together to make our body do what we want to do for work and play.

The Bible uses our body as a picture of the church. We have one body but it is made up of many parts. In the same way we are one church but we have many members. Each one of us has different gifts and abilities and we are to use them for the good of the church.

Paul wrote about this in Romans 12 which begins the practical part of this letter. In chapters 3-11 he wrote about how God has saved us through Jesus.

Then in chapter 12 he wrote about how we should serve God in gratitude for such a great salvation. He began with how we should serve each other in the church.

This is an important subject and so he introduced it with a reminder that he was writing as an apostle; "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you...."

1. First of all he urges us to make **AN ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF OUR GIFTS** (v 3)

a. He wrote, "*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought...*"

It is possible for you to think too *little* of yourself, to be too humble, to have too low an opinion of your gifts and abilities. Sometimes we meet people who have a false humility and *under-estimate* themselves. But we don't meet them too often because there aren't many people like that!

It is far more common for us to think too *highly* of ourselves, to *over-estimate* our abilities, to have an inflated opinion of our own importance.

We think to ourselves in our home or workplace; "What would they do without me? How would they manage? How would they get along without the benefit of my experience? If I weren't here to keep an eye on things, who knows what might happen!" We think we are indispensable, that we are the only one who can do this properly.

Pride is far more common than humility.

In Galatians 6:3 Paul wrote; "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing he deceives himself."

And here he wrote, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought." He continued...

b. "*...but rather think of yourself with sober judgement...*"

The Greek word means to be sober-minded, to not go beyond the set boundaries. We need an accurate assessment of ourselves that is based on objective evidence. Our judgement should be true and right - not thinking too highly of ourselves, nor too lowly.

c. Your judgement should be *"...in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."*

Paul directs us to the object of our faith, the Lord Jesus. Assess yourself in accordance with the faith you have in Christ and in his cross. True faith is the knowledge, conviction and deep-rooted assurance that my sins have been forgiven because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross for me. This is what marks a Christian. This is what all Christians believe. This is what unifies us in the church. We have this in common - that we believe in the saving death of the Lord Jesus. We recognise that we are dependent on him, every one of us. If we keep this in mind we will be realistic about the gifts God has given us through faith in Christ.

2. Having made an accurate assessment of our gifts Paul then wants us, secondly, to **RECOGNISE THE UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF THE CHURCH** (v 4-5)

a. He emphasises the **unity** of the church. "Just as each of us has one body with many members...so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

When the new season potatoes are harvested they are placed in bags. You should *not* think of the church as a bag of potatoes. Yes, there is some unity in that because all these potatoes, of different shapes and sizes, are all in the same bag. But there is no real unity between them; each potato could be on its own, it doesn't need any of the others, it is not connected to the others in any way.

The church is not like a bag of potatoes, but rather like the human body. Your body is made up of many different parts, each of which has a different function, but "each member belongs to all the others." If you lose your hand or your foot you will be severely handicapped; so too if you lose your eyes or your hearing - that will be a major disability. And if you lose your heart or your liver you will be dead.

What's more, individual parts of your body cannot survive without the rest of the body. If your leg is separated from your body it is useless. If you take out your eye it can't function by itself. Each part is only alive and useful when it is connected with the rest of the body.

So too in the church: we are the body of Christ. He is the head and we are his members. We are only alive because of our connection with him; and we can only function because of our connection with each other, with the rest of the church. None of us can survive without each other.

You could compare this to a fire. Some of you have wood burners in your home. When you have a good fire going you can look through the glass and see a lot of embers glowing together. If you were to get a pair of tongs and take out one of those glowing embers and put it on the tiles by itself it would soon go out. The rest of the fire would be burning hot but that one on its own will quickly get cold.

That is true in the church too. If you are part of the church and remain close to the other members and attend worship and join a Bible study then it is likely that you will remain spiritually hot and you will continue to burn brightly for the Lord; but if you separate yourself from the church you will get spiritually cold.

Jesus calls you to be a living member of his body, the church. He wants us to worship together, to fellowship together, to pray together, to study the Bible together, to encourage each other in our relationship with Jesus.

You can only do that by being an active part of the church. Some people stay at home and watch a church service on TV. They think they are part of the electronic church. But that is not what this passage is talking about. Every Christian needs the living fellowship of other believers who are flesh and blood like you. We need to meet together in worship, as we are doing today, and we need to meet together in our homes, visiting each other and inviting others in.

Let's encourage one another to do this and let's draw in those who may be drifting away or inclined to be on their own. We are the body of Christ and each one of us belongs to all the others. This is the unity of the church.

b. Within this unity there is also **diversity**.

Our bodies are made up of many different parts. So too in the church; there are many of us and we are all different. We have different functions, a variety of gifts and various abilities. Every one of us has been given a gift - at least one - and we are to use our gifts for the overall functioning of the church.

The church is like a pipe organ. It has some pipes that are very large and tall, and others that are very small, and then everything in between. Every one of those pipes is necessary for a good sound. They all contribute to the piece of music being played. They are all important. So too in the church; every one of you is important, every one of you is necessary.

3. This is why Paul goes on, thirdly, to urge you to **USE THE GIFTS GOD HAS GIVEN YOU** (v 6-8)

“We have different gifts according to the grace given us.”

There are many different gifts in the church. Paul mentions just seven here, but there are many more. Others are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and others in Ephesians 4. The Bible does not list all the gifts that could be mentioned but it lists some to show us the great variety of abilities and gifts in the church.

Paul mentions that we have these “according to the grace given us.” A gift is something given to you. It is not something you worked for or deserved or earned. It is not something you generated within yourself but rather something the Holy Spirit gave to you. It is a gift - freely given.

That is why we can never be proud of our gifts or boast about them as though we are so great. Any gift we have is ours is because God gave it to us; anything we do with it is because he enabled us to use it.

We are like instruments in the hand of a skilled surgeon. We are only useful because God is using us. He could choose to lay us to one side and use someone else. All we do is by God's grace. This helps us keep a sober assessment of ourselves; this keeps us humble.

Paul mentions **seven specific gifts** and how they should be used.

"If a man's gift is **prophesying** let him use it in proportion to his faith."

At the time Paul was writing the NT was still being written and so there were people who prophesied. They were given direct revelation from God and they spoke God's message to his people.

Now that we have the complete word of God in the Scriptures there is no further need for direct or ongoing revelation. This gift of prophesying could be compared to the gift of preaching today where the word of God is applied to our lives and our situation.

Some of you have the gift of **servicing**. You are willing and able to help others in practical ways.

Some of you have a gift of **teaching**, of being able to explain the Scriptures in a clear manner that others can understand and grasp.

Some of you have a gift of **encouragement**. You can get alongside others and help them, strengthen them in trials, support them in difficulties, assist them on their way. Paul's missionary companion, Barnabas, was known as the Son of Encouragement.

Some of you have the gift of *giving*, of contributing to the needs of others. If that is your gift then give generously, with liberality.

Some of you have the gift of *leadership*. People follow you. You can give direction. If that is your gift then govern diligently. Don't be casual, slap-happy, easy-going; rather be well-organised, earnest, attentive and eager.

Some of you have the gift of *showing mercy*. If that is your gift then be cheerful, not grumpy; be willing, not grudging; show mercy gladly not just out of a sense of duty.

Each one of you has a gift. It might be one of those already mentioned, or it might be administration, or helping, or music, evangelism, faith, wisdom, knowledge or discernment.

Some of these gifts are more visible than others. Some are public and obvious, others are more in the background. You won't always see everyone using their particular gifts because some people do this quietly, unnoticed by others. They bake a cake, make a phone call, cook a meal, visit someone who is lonely or grieving. These may not be visible to many but they are important in the life of the church and of great value in the eyes of Jesus.

What gifts do you have? Are you using them in the church? Are you an active member of this body of Christ? Are you occupied in serving others in some way?

Or are you sitting on the sideline? Are you along for the ride? Are you taking a back seat? Are you letting others do all the work?

Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think; have a sober, realistic assessment of yourself.

Remember that together we are the body of Christ; we have different members but we are all connected together; we are different parts but each one of us belongs to the Lord Jesus.

Use the gifts the Holy Spirit has given to you for the good of the church and for the glory of God.

Amen