

Few people have had as many natural endowments or achievements to feel proud of as Edwin Hubble... (the astronomer for whom the Hubble Space Telescope was named.)

Hubble was a gifted athlete. As writer Bill Bryson recounts:

"At a single high school track meet in 1906, he won the pole vault, shot put, discus, hammer throw, standing high jump, and running high jump, and was on the winning mile-relay team that is seven first places in one meet and came in third in the broad jump. In the same year, he set a state record for the high jump in Illinois..."

On top of his athletic gifts... Hubble was extremely good-looking. One person described him as "*handsome almost to a fault.*" Another called him an "*Adonis.*"

If that weren't enough... Hubble was intellectually gifted. He studied physics and astronomy at the elite University of Chicago... and he was selected to be one of the *first* Rhodes scholars at Oxford.

When Hubble began his career as an astronomer at Mount Wilson Observatory in California (in 1919)... only one galaxy was known: the Milky Way. ... But Hubble showed in a landmark paper in 1924... that the universe contained many galaxies. ... Then Hubble proved that the universe was expanding... an idea no physicist or astronomer had conceived of before. ... Either one of these achievements would have guaranteed Hubble a place in history. Yet for Hubble all of this was not enough.

Hubble claimed he spent most of his late 20's and early 30's as a prestigious lawyer in Kentucky. Actually... he spent those years as a high school teacher in Indiana.

Hubble boasted that in World War I he had bravely led "*frightened men to safety across the battlefields of France.*" The truth was... he arrived in France only one month before the Armistice and probably never heard one shot fired.

Hubble told people how he had daringly rescued drowning swimmers. But that story never happened.

Hubble bragged about how he had taken on an exhibition fight with a world-class boxer and surprised the champion with an amazing knockdown punch. ... That (also) was too good to be true. ... [P A U S E] ...

What is it in human nature that makes us willing to lie to enhance our image - even when we clearly don't need to...? ... Some people have been doing it for so long that they have come to believe the lies they regularly tell about themselves. ... What about you...? If you are honest... you would probably have to admit that you sometimes try to portray an image of yourself... that you know is not quite accurate... (don't you?)

Very few people – even believers – think right about themselves.

Some people ask, "*Who am I?*" and expect the answer to come from their accomplishments. Other people ask, "*Who am I?*" and expect the answer to come from what other people think about them. ... But a person who dares to ask this question in light of God's Word will have the truest answer.

Very few people – even believers – think right about themselves. (But here is the good news.) ... Our passage today will not only exhort us to have a proper self-evaluation - it will tell us how we can.

Our passage last week told us to give our minds to the Lord... and we start right-up today with three things that a transformed mind will think right about. The first one is right thinking about ourselves. (You see) when we give our mind to the Lord and He transforms it... our re-newed mind will be:

- I. Thinking Rightly About Ourselves (Romans 12:3)
- II. Thinking Rightly About Fellow Believers (Romans 12:4-5)
- III. Thinking Rightly About Our Gifts (Romans 12:6-8)

When a person becomes a Christian... he enters into a new relationship with God... and into a new relationship with God's people. ... Both these new relationships call for major adjustments in our thinking and attitudes. We must think right about ourselves and others.

(Now)... last week we studied Romans 12:1-2 and (in light of our relationship to God)... we saw some adjusting we must do. You'll remember that we need to give Him our body... our mind... and our will.

Our verses *today* will teach about a believer's relationship to other believers. ... But... (and this HUGE... please hear me on this...) a believer will not adjust his/her thinking and attitude toward other believers... unless they FIRST think right about their own self. ... So that is where Paul starts (with verse 3).

Romans 12:3

The language here is **alive**. ... We could render Paul's admonition: "*I say to everyone, do not super-think of yourself,*" or perhaps "*Do not get hyper about yourself!*" ... Paul writes this (as if) *thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think*... is a universal tendency of the human race. (And... you know what?) I believe it **is**. Our sinful nature loves to over-think itself.

We may either: **#1.** overestimate our own importance... or we may **#2.** go to the other extreme... and depreciate ourselves to the point of false humility.

#1. *We might overestimate our own importance.* This is the greater of the two dangers... because it is the one that comes to us most naturally. The reason it does... is that it is linked to pride... the first and most deadly of the seven deadly sins in Proverbs 6:16.

It is easy for us to spot pride in others. All of us probably know someone who loves to tell us how well-educated they are on various topics. They regularly spotlight their accomplishments and what they have acquired. Our pride-filled friends can never hear a story without having to top it. ... Obviously... they know more... have had worse experiences happen to them... have traveled to better places... worked harder... and played better... accomplished more — and (of course) are never (**ever**) wrong! ... It is nauseating to see it in others... isn't it?

It would be nice if this type of pride did **not** exist in our own life (as believers) ... but unfortunately... it does (to various degrees.) ... We may not vocalize it... but it comes out in our attitude. Behaviors are displayed

that say: *'I am a better Christian because I know my Bible better than you... or because I have listened to a certain Bible teacher... read certain books... attended Christian conferences - and you haven't... or because I have been in the church longer than you... or I am from a larger church...'*

Evangelical gatherings are often marked by a certain **smugness** about the uniqueness of "**our** generation" in God's plan... "**Our** generation (not yours) honored God better..." "We already know what you still need to figure out..." ...**OR**... "We have better methods of worship... witnessing... and Bible study than your old ways... New is always better... and we are here now to lead..."

#1. We might overestimate our own importance. **#2.** (Another danger is) We may think too lowly of ourselves. ... Sometimes this is really **pride**... because... when we tell people bad things about ourselves... what we really want them to say is... "No, I don't think you're like that at all. I think you're really intelligent (or wise or attractive or kind or whatever)." ... We are thinking: "Keep it up. Tell me more. I'd like you to talk me **out** of this..." ... If the other person remains silent... we are insulted. Their silence shouts: "Yes, I guess you really are an incompetent and hopeless case..." ... False humility assumes a **pose of humility**... without any idea as to what **true** humility is.

(You know)... we usually think about ourselves too much. ... Yet the solution Paul offers is not to **stop** thinking about ourselves entirely... but instead to start thinking about ourselves in a right way. ... This has two parts: **(A)** We are to think of ourselves "with sober judgment" and **(B)** We are to think of ourselves "each according to the measure of faith God has

assigned." ... Let's (briefly) look at this first one. (It is the easier of the two to understand.)

(A) sober judgment tells ourselves that our salvation is by God's grace alone. Our spiritual growth is also by grace... as God could have withheld any of the opportunities... situations... and people in our lives... that have made us what we are. God chose us (who are weak) for His purposes.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (ESV)

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Now for the second part of Paul instruction for thinking right about ourselves... **(B)** We are to think of ourselves "each according to the measure of faith God has assigned." What in the world does this mean?

This most important phrase has often been given the **misleading** interpretation that "sound judgment" comes in proportion to the degree of our faith. (In other words... if we have strong faith we will think **rightly** of ourselves.) But... (here) "faith" does not have its usual meaning... In this verse it means: "the spiritual power given to each Christian for accomplishing what God wants them to do." ... Paul is encouraging us to look at ourselves in light of the gifts we have... and how we are exercising our faith in using them. (Evaluate yourself **this** way!)

(Let me explain) ... We exercise our spiritual gifts **by faith**.

(Furthermore) If we are proud... we will **not** exercise faith in using our

spiritual gifting - to benefit others. ... On the other hand... if we consider ourselves worthless... we **also** withhold what God intended to deliver to others through us. (LISTEN!) People do not use their spiritual gifts **BECAUSE** they do not think right about themselves. ... How we are using our gifts in building up the body of Christ... is the measurement for how we are to think about ourselves. THOSE WHO THINK RIGHTLY ABOUT THEMSELVES RECOGNIZE THAT THEY DO NOT EXIST FOR THEMSELVES. ... [P A U S E] ... They will think along the lines of:

"I am part of the plan of God. God is working out all things to a great and final purpose on the earth, and I am part of it. God has given me abilities to accomplish certain things in the body of Christ for this purpose. I am answering God's call by divine enablement. This gives me purpose and significance and meaning.

We are to evaluate ourselves on the basis of how we are answering the call of God by divine enablement. Every believer has been given a spiritual gift. If you say that you don't have any spiritual gifting... you are saying that you are not a Christian.

1 Peter 4:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

Don't think too much of yourself... and don't think too little of yourself. ... Each of us is responsible for discovering what our particular gifts are and using them. Every single believer has been gifted by God. (Not a single believer has been omitted by God.) It is a **false humility** that says, "*I don't have anything to offer to anyone. God can't use me.*" ... [P A U S E] ... Discover what your gifting is and start using it.

A transformed mind: **I.** Thinks right about him/herself (and) **II.** Thinks right about fellow believers.

Romans 12:4-6a

Paul here introduces one of his favorite illustrations. Nothing could picture harmony better... than a body that has each of its parts fitted to its proper place and carrying out its rightful function. ... What is true of the human body is true of the body of Christ. ... There is no such thing as an unimportant or worthless believer... even though some functions are more visible than others.

There is no rivalry between the members of a body - only mutual respect and coordination. ... There is also the closest intimacy between members of a body... each one depending for certain things upon every other member. ... So when one member rejoices... the others rejoice... and when one part is injured or paralyzed... the whole body suffers. When I was in high school... I severely damaged my left shoulder... and I remember that the rest of my body felt so bad that it stayed up all night (for weeks) to keep my shoulder company!

Each of us belongs to... and needs the others. ... It doesn't matter who you are... I need your gifting ...and so does the rest of the church. Spiritual gifts are tools to strengthen Christ's body with - not toys to play with. It would be correct to add... that you have a right to the gifts that the other members of the body have been given... and they have a right to your gift. You cheat them if you do not use it. ... [P A U S E] ...

A transformed mind: **I.** Thinks right about him/herself ... **II.** Thinks right about fellow believers... (as necessary parts of the body with equal importance) ... and... **III.** Thinks right about our gifts.

Romans 12:6b-8

The first thing that I need to point out is that the list of spiritual gifts that we just read is not exhaustive. (There are other gifts that are not mentioned here.) ... To compose a list of every spiritual gift would not be easy (if it can be done at all.)

Every time there is a listing of the gifts in the New Testament they have different components. ... Scripture has five lists (Rom. 12:6-8... 1 Cor. 12:8-10... and 28-30... Eph. 4:11... 1 Peter 4:11.) Some of them repeat gifts.. and others introduce new ones.... Plus... different words seem to describe the same gift. (An example would be “serving” and “helping.” (These appear to be the same gift.)

Because each list given in Scripture is different... that tells me that NONE of them is to be thought of as comprehensive (as though no other gifts exist.) There are probably gifts that could be mentioned in any of these lists but are not. ... These lists are examples.

Are you wondering what your spiritual gift is...? As we look now at the list of Romans 12... look at how these examples strengthen other believers. That is what your gift will do when you employ it. Is there an ability that you have that brings you joy and will help others grow in Christ... like these do?

The first on this list in Romans 12 is prophecy. This word properly means: “*to declare the Divine will; to interpret the purposes of God; or to make known in any way the truth of God, which is designed to influence men.*” ... At first prophecy meant to *predict* or *foretell* future events. ... But as those who did this commonly connected their predictions with instructions... exhortations... warnings of dangers... and duties of men... (this word – “prophecy”) came to denote any communication of the will of God.

Strictly speaking... prophets (before the Bible was complete)... spoke when prompted by God... and by the authority of God. Their words were to be taken as though heard directly from Him. ... The prophets were God’s “mouthpieces” and they spoke without error. (If they had any error – God’s people were instructed to stone the false prophet to death – Deut. 13:1-2.) ... When the last letter of the Bible was penned and the last apostle died... there was no more need for divinely inspired prophets. We now have the inspired and completed Scripture.

However... to a lesser degree... there remain in the body today preachers and teachers... whose primary role is forth-telling. These individuals are gifted by the Holy Spirit... with a divine enablement to proclaim God’s Word in penetrating and convicting ways. ... They... too... speak as God’s “mouthpieces” ONLY as they remain faithful to the message of Scripture.

Evangelists... preachers... and writers are good modern-day examples... who... though... they are not prophets... they may have this (forth-telling) gift of prophecy - strengthening the faith of God’s people in the church by declaring and warning them - from the inspired and completed Scripture.

Look again with me at the end of verse six: “*if prophecy, in proportion to our faith.*” NOTICE: it does not say “*in proportion to YOUR faith...*” We might expect that. (“Use your gift in proportion to your faith...”) But instead... Paul is implying some control or limitation on the person who uses this gift. Prophecy is not to proclaim anything that is contrary to “*our faith.*” “Our faith” is the body of truth that has been delivered to the saints – by Scripture!

The second spiritual gift mentioned in our passage is “servicing.” This is a gift of seeing the needs of the believers... enlisting the necessary resources... and making sure that the body of Christ is properly cared for. Those with this gift rarely have to be told what is needed. They simply discern needs... know how to help... and then do so without any need for notice or expectation of applause. ... Many times such service is performed behind the scenes without concern for what people may say.

The gift of serving is the very special ability to serve... minister... aid... help... and assist others — to assist them in such a way that they are *built up* and truly helped. It is the most practical of gifts. Most of us know a few people who are always willing and who are unusually gifted to help others when help is needed. ... All of us can help... and all of us can develop our willingness and ability to help... but there are some believers who are unusually gifted with the very special gift of ministry.

Although the gift of serving is given to some... all believers are to embrace a servant spirit like the one portrayed by Jesus when He washed His disciples' feet shortly before He died on the cross.

John 13:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

So let's do it! That is what the text says. (In the case of prophecy... we are told that the prophet is to prophesy "in proportion to our faith." That is a qualification or directive.) ... But that is not the case here. The verse says: "*If it is serving, let him serve.*" In other words... "*Just do it!*"

Our third spiritual gift is **teaching**. Teaching is the ability to explain... root... and ground people in the truth. This may seem like the same gift as prophecy... but its not. What's the difference...? Prophecy PROCLAIMS truth (it declares and warns...)... while teaching EXPLAINS the truth.

Teachers have the ability to communicate revealed truth with knowledge... ease... and clarity. ... They are gifted in bringing the printed Word into flesh-and-bone life. ... They help others learn accurate facts... discover principles... see their practical relevance... and apply them. This gift sets forth the fundamental truths of the Bible for the building-up of the saints.

Our fourth gift is **exhortation**. Exhortation is the gift that arouses people to get up and get busy fulfilling their task for the Lord... (to stir people to make a decision.)

Those who have this gift have the ability to drive truth home passionately... confront wrong constructively... turn Scripture reading into an action plan... unite believers behind a common endeavor — and they can usually do this without offense. (The Greek word is parakletos... which also means to come along-side and comfort) ... So the exhorter's tough talk is laced with

encouragement. ... But this gift (exhortation) is most frequently addressed to the conscience and the heart... whereas teaching is more often addressed to the mind.

What a tremendous need we have today for those who are like that. Many people are hurting... but there are not many encouraging... because we are all so absorbed in ourselves... and our own private affairs. ... We are living in a narcissistic age... the "*Me Decade*."

The next gift is "one who contributes" or "the gift of giving." Those endowed by God with this special gift of sharing are enabled to give in unusual measure for the good of Christ's body. While all believers are instructed to be generous... these people look for opportunities to give... offering what they have beyond normal measure. Sometimes they are wealthy. But more often... they are people of average means who generally give their time... energy... and expertise.

Gifted givers don't want bronze plaques or buildings named after them. There's nothing particularly wrong with either... but supernatural givers don't want all that attention. They much prefer anonymity. They see a need and then seek to meet it.

Those who I have known and I believe have the gift of giving have an attitude toward material goods along the lines of: It is not ... "*how much of my money shall I give to God*" ... but rather ... "*how much of God's money shall I keep for myself.*"

Number six is the gift of leadership. People respect leaders who know where they are going and how to take others with them. ... They know the way... are decisive... and move forward confidently.

Those gifted in leadership are to supervise with enthusiasm. ... It says in verse 8 that those who exercise spiritual leadership in the church... whether pastors or elders or deacons or committee leaders... are not to "*wing it*." ... Leaders should not become casual and careless. ... There is no room for laziness... complacency... and irresponsibility in God's church. The leaders are the ones who are to blaze the path for the flock of God... and they are to do it with zeal... hard work... and iron determination.

The final gift in our passage is "the gift of mercy." ... Those with the gift of mercy exercise the extraordinary ability to sense the needs of those who are hurting... and to know what to say... how to say it... and when to remain silent. ... Those who show mercy treat people with kindness - even to those who may not deserve it. ... Genuine mercy is usually in short supply... because we are naturally self-centered and judgmental. ... But believers who demonstrate this gift are simply reflecting the mercy they have received through Christ. ... They deal kindly and gently with others who are undergoing periods of deep distress... confusion... and uncertainty.

Here are seven examples of spiritual gifts... which we might see as "*perfumes for the body of Christ*." If we allowed God to transform our thinking... just imagine how nice our church would smell! ... Without right thinking... believers will not use their gifts.

Is God speaking to you about your thinking...?

THOSE WHO THINK RIGHTLY ABOUT THEMSELVES RECOGNIZE
THAT THEY DO NOT EXIST FOR THEMSELVES.

Your opinion of yourself needs to be on the basis of how you are allowing God to use you! God has given you gifts to build-up the body of Christ. They are His! Use them for His glory. Answer the call of God by divine enablement.