

Romans 12:3-8

“Church Membership”

What exactly is “Church Membership?” It seems that many today would seem to believe that as long as you’ve identified yourself with a local body of believers, you’ve stated to them that you’d like to be a “Member of the church” and if they as a congregation vote you in, you sign your name on the line and you’ve officially become a member of the church.

Though there may be an element of accountability that goes along with signing up to be a part of a local body officially, you’ll be hard pressed to find contextual, balanced support for that biblically. and There are different fellowships that feel different ways about the whole topic of “Church membership.” and I’m not here to throw stones at *any* of them, but I do think you have to be careful because along with church membership *can come* (I’m not saying it always happens), but there *can come* that pseudo sense of confidence thinking that, “I’m ok with God because I was baptized when I was 10 and I’ve been a member of such and such a church for the last 15 yrs.” As though those things act as a sort of spiritual fire insurance, but here’s the news flash, being baptized, or (as far as our context this morning is concerned) signing your name on a piece of paper somewhere saying, “I’m a member of this ‘church’” doesn’t save anybody.

The bible really doesn’t teach us to identify ourselves with any “body” except for one and that’s the body of Christ, period. and If you’ve given your life to Christ, Jesus has come into your heart, forgiven you of your sin, and made you a new creation, than you’re a “member” of the body of Christ, or another way to understand that is that you’re a member of the church. I think Paul gives a great definition of “Church membership” right here in Vs 4-5 of Rom Ch 12, notice. (Read)

If you belong to Jesus Christ than you’re a *member* of His body, of His church, you’re a church member, now if having become a part of the body of Christ, God calls you to fellowship with us as your church home, we think that’s great, we’re excited to have you with us. What does that mean to you? Just what the bible says; if you believe that God has called you here, than you’ve willfully decided to subject yourself to the accountability of this ministry, and those whom God has called to be the overseers of this body. and We look forward to being a blessing to you, and we’re excited to see how God is going to begin to move in you to become an active part of what God is doing here. I don’t in any way, shape or form believe that the bible supports church hopping, or never rooting or grounding yourself into a local body of believers, because then *there is no accountability*, you’re free to fly under the radar. No one knows if you’re walking right with the Lord, if you’ve slipped into compromise, no one can really be there *for* you, or bear your burdens *with* you, or if necessary *exhort* you unto godliness. You don’t have overseers, or church leaders that you subject yourself to, which is what the bible calls us to do.

So if you're not accountable to any particular local body of believers, than you invite question marks, ambiguity, compromise, and all kinds of difficulties into your life that could be otherwise easily avoided. God established a godly "chain of command" for a reason, because He's a God of order, He's created things in an orderly fashion, and we need order in our lives, it's just a good thing.

Why do I bring all this up? Because as we mentioned last week we've spent the last several months, studying the book of Romans receiving doctrinal illumination, but as Paul begins to pen what would become Ch 12 he makes the transition into practical application. Now that we've received *revelation* as to what God has done for us in Christ, he gives us the *exhortation* as to how that should be spilling out in the practical through our lives.

He's dealing with the interrelations of a local church body, how we're to interact with one another, how the life of Christ is lived out *among* us, and then also the world *around* us. But before he could speak of our *interrelations practically*, he needed to speak 1st of the priority of our *dedication/consecration* to God *personally*. Because even as we mentioned last week of how we're to serve God, not in hopes of getting closer *to* Him, or receiving some favoritism *from* Him, but rather out of the overflow of my love *for* Him understanding all that He's done for me in Christ. It stands to reason then that if I'm going to be busy about kingdom business *unto* Him that I 1st need to make sure I'm right *with* Him. Because I'm not going to be able to rightly represent Him, if I'm 1st not right with Him. How can I be rightly *related* to you, if I'm not 1st of all *dedicated* to the Lord? But now that Paul has dealt with our *consecration* to God, he moves now into our interrelations with one another.

Vs3-8

So as Paul prepares us to understand how we're to relate *with* one another, and how we're to minister *to* one another he tells us straight out of the shoot that proper perspective is essential. In Vs3 we find that the bridge that links spiritual consecration, with practical application is *humility*. He says, "I say through the grace given to me, to *everyone* who is among you (there are no exceptions), not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly." In other words we're to interact with one another in a spirit of genuine humility, and lets keep the context, though that's a truism that goes across the board *generally*, we're speaking here with in the confines of the exercising of spiritual gifts *specifically*. Paul says that when it comes to the way in which God has opted to use us, and given some gift or gifts of His Spirit *to* us that we're not to be proud in regards to it, but rather we're to walk in humility with respect to it, and to one another.

I'm not sure what it is about spiritual gifts given to the body of Christ, but there's something about them that cause us to want to get puffed up because God would use us in a specific way, or a certain capacity. and I find that there's a tendency for us to look down on others who may not be gifted in the way that God has gifted us. For instance God may've given one the gift of organization/administration, and so they're exercising that gift by availing themselves to keep the fellowship organized, they're just busy behind the scenes making this place look great for when you and I come in. But often times those with administrative gifts can't believe the rest of us are such slob, that we'd have the audacity to leave a bulletin in the seat, or a communion cup in the floor. (Now I'm not picking on you whom God has gifted this way, this is by way of example, you're vital to the ministry, and I won't limit it to you) and surely we should all do our part in picking up after ourselves. But God has just given them an eye for detail, and it's often times difficult for them to understand why every one of us doesn't share that same conviction. But the evangelist would say, "Why are you so worried about that, you need to be out there saving souls, sharing the gospel, seeing people saved, the neatness of the building needs to be about 23rd on the list." Then the teacher comes along and says, "Hey, that's awesome getting people saved and all, but what are you doing with them afterwards, getting fish in the boat is one thing, but if they're flopping out the other side because you're not tending to them once you get them, what's the point? They need to be rooted, taught, disciplined..." We'll develop this a little more in a minute but the idea that Paul is putting across to us is that we all have our part and need one another individually to form the body collectively in its entirety. So we need to have the proper perspective and realize that we each excel in the area God has called *us* to, and we need not occupy ourselves so much with what God's called *other's* to.

When it comes to spiritual gifts, we do well to realize that that's exactly what they are, gifts, there's nothing we've done to earn them or somehow merit them, God simply yet sovereignly gives us various gifts to enable us to function appropriately with in the capacity that He's called us to. But He gifts others in different ways because He's called them to a different capacity, so don't get all puffed up because God's gifted you by His Spirit, He's gifted every believer by His Spirit, Paul told the Corinthians, "*For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*" 1 Cor 4:7 Or to understand that another way, we're all the same, sinners saved by grace, and that God should choose to entrust to us *any* part of His plan, should only humble me, because it's all of His grace, I don't have any thing of eternal value but that God didn't give it to me, so why put off like I'm something special? To the Galatians he said, "*For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*" Gal 6:3

Now having said that we're not to belittle ourselves either, that's the other extreme, some are puffed up, others are always putting themselves down, Paul says don't do that either. Just be genuine in your self assessment, realize that God is moving in different ways in different people's lives and do what you can do to be a blessing in the lives of those around you via the way that God has gifted you. Think soberly of yourself, examine yourself, and function with in the capacity that God has called you to, He's given you a measure of faith to perform the role He's called you to, excel in that, grow through that, should God choose to do other things, He owns the editing rights to your life, but don't worry about what God might want to do later, be faithful in the area that He's called you to now.

Vs4-5

What are we seeing here? Unity through diversity, we're one body with many members, and Paul uses the analogy of the human frame to help us get a grip on what it means to be a member of the body of Christ and individually comprising one unit collectively. and This isn't the only place you find him using this illustration, it's in 1st Cor, Eph, and Colossians as well. and We're able to glean a couple different things from this, #1 Every individual member is needed if the body is to be whole. If my right hand was to be severed, though I could still function, my body would be hindered in certain capacities, if I'm to function just as God originally intended me to, I need every member of my body. So to with the body of Christ, there's no "expendable" members. If we're to function in full as God intends for us to, every member has his/her part and is to be engaged accordingly in that role. Which brings me to my next point, this is a call to *involvement*, not *isolation*, there's no member of my body that's able to isolate itself from the others, every member of my body is present and accounted for (minus my tonsils ;0)) and is engaged in active service.

As soon as a member isolates itself, my heart starts doing its own thing, my kidneys, or liver begin to act out in a manner that they're not intended to, I have a critical situation on my hands, my whole body is impacted and effected, my heart and lungs can't say, "Fine liver, who needs you anyway!" If one member goes down, my whole body goes down with it.

So Paul is saying here that we're all different in the way God has called us, but we all depend upon one another individually in order to accomplish God's agenda collectively. Even those areas that aren't high profile, the kidneys, what's a primary objective of kidneys, to help eradicate toxins from the blood stream. If they weren't functioning properly the body would die, its not a pretty job, or one that's envied, but it has to be done. So to in the body, there are people in place, leadership, elders, people who at times that have to confront situations, remove toxins, keep the blood of the body pure so that the work isn't poisoned.

But if everyone was a kidney, than (not only would we look funky) we'd never get anywhere because we need a head, torso, legs and feet to get down the road, but that'll only get you so far with out arms and hands. You see the body depends on its individual members to function appropriately as a whole. Leave Romans Ch 12 and look at 1st Cor 12 (Vs 12-27).

If my head is pounding, or my stomach is puking, the rest of my body isn't out having a good time, my whole body suffers with it, the bible says we're to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. So the body takes care of its members, but the members take care of the body. Each individual member is to serve the body as a whole, my mouth doesn't serve itself, it's the means by which *my body* as whole is nourished, my legs don't serve themselves, they carry my body as a whole where I need to go, my eyes, give direction to my body, my lungs give oxygen to my body, my heart supplies blood to my body, each individual member supplies the need of the whole, none of them serving themselves, but each of them serving the body. Jesus said, *"You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."* Mark 10:42-45

You always know something is wrong when someone's attitude is about being blessed, rather than being a blessing, we're not here to be served individually, but to serve the body collectively. and When the body realizes there's a need individually, we come along side that member, the desire being to nurture and restore that person individually and help to find their place once again in the body collectively. We're to minister to one another personally/genuinely, but we realize that there's a big picture in reality, and if we're to function appropriately as the body we all need to be active in whatever role God has called us to, and there are many. Notice

Vs6-8

Now this is not an exhaustive list of the gifts of the Spirit, there is no all inclusive kind of list found in the scriptures. There are 7 listed here and these gifts focus on *expounding God's word*, and *expanding God's work*, we have listed here, prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and mercy. 1st Cor mentions word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, miracles, healings, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and again we read there, *"...the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:"* 1 Cor 12:7 which is to say that God doesn't anoint our lives for our own personal profit, but for the benefit of the entire body.

Something else we need to understand as we dip into the subject of the gifts of the Spirit is that, *"...the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills."* 1 Cor 12:11 Which is to say that if you pray or seek God for a miracle, and God does that work, it doesn't mean that the next time you pray for a miracle it's going to happen. It's not according to *your* will, it's according to *His*.

We also realize that the Holy Spirit gifts some of us with the same gift in various capacities. For instance you've been in that situation whereby you were witnessing to that person, and they asked you a question and you're not sure how it happened but all the sudden you were quoting scripture, explaining the issue, giving them substance to chew on, and conviction to think through. You were just able to supply the answers to their questions, you walked away, and it was like, "Man, where did that come from? I'm not even sure what I said, but I know the Lord just used me." and The Spirit gifted you with the ability to teach that person in that moment, but does that mean that God has called to into the office of a teacher? Not necessarily, but it was His will in that moment for you to teach that person something of His heart and His Word, or His ways, so the Spirit came upon you and you were given the gift to teach that person.

Other's God calls into the office of a teacher, others still into the office of a Pastor/teacher. So there are different shades of the same gift that God uses to paint our lives like an artist using various hues of the same color on a canvas, and He paints a picture that's unique to us around and upon each of our lives. So in proportion to our faith, or the faith that God has measured out to us, so we utilize the gifts He's given us.

Now that faith can grow, how? By way of exercising it, faith is like a muscle, the more you use it, the more it grows, so both understanding and effort are essential in the exercising of the gifts. Paul told Timothy, "...*I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*" 2 Tim 1:6 and The way we're to stir our gifts is by means of use, that phrase, "Stir up" actually speaks of an ember of coal that has the potential of dying out. If you're not using the gifts God's given you than like a muscle that's not use it'll atrophy, weaken, degenerate, we're to constantly be kindling the gift/gifts God's given us. and We're to desire the *best* gifts the bible says, what's the best gifts? Depends on what God's called you to, if God's called you to clean this facility than "teaching" probably isn't the most desirable, but administrations would sure be helpful. For me as a "Pastor/teacher" obviously, teaching, but word of wisdom/knowledge, prophecy, the gift of exhortation, discerning of spirits, leading, man I need these things at work in me, I desire them. So what the best gifts for me might be, may not be the best gifts for you.

Let's look quickly at the gifts mentioned here, 1st of all we read of "prophecy." Now the bible teaches that the office of a prophet no longer exists, just like the office of an apostle no longer exists, Eph 2:20 tells us that the church was laid on the *foundation* of the prophets and the apostles, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. But as for the gift of prophecy, we recognize its legitimacy. What is prophecy? Most people believe it speaks of a "foretelling" of the future, and at times it can include that, but more accurately it's a "Forth telling" of the Word of God.

The bible says quite clearly, “...*he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.*” 1 Cor 14:3 So that if God places a word in your mouth that edifies the body, or an individual, or motivates them to holiness, or comforts them in their time of need, God has administered the gift of prophecy through you to them. So often people want to make the gifts of the Spirit some esoteric mystical experience, but God knows where we live, and He ministers supernaturally to us, in practical ways. Now notice he says that when we prophecy it needs to be in proportion to our faith. More accurately translated, “In proportion to *the* faith,” speaking of the embodiment of the revealed/written Word of God. So that what Paul seems to be saying here is that anything that we speak on *behalf* of God, needs to line up with the revealed/written *word* of God. God will never speak outside of the parameters of His written Word.

So if someone comes to you and tells you some goofy thing that can in no way be supported biblically, yet they tell you its God’s Word for you personally, reject it. and Be careful of people speaking God’s will for you anyway, if God’s spoken something to you and then someone confirms that, that may be one thing. and God can speak to you through other people no doubt, that’s part of why we’re here now, but I used to know a guy who seemed to think that it was his calling to tell everyone else what God’s calling was for their lives. and It just made for a mess, God knows how to get your attention, and when He’s moving you a certain direction, He’ll let you know, and again He may begin to speak to your heart through others, but exercise caution with that.

Ministry, or serving, specifically this is the word from which we get our word “Deacon” if God’s called you to serve the body, in the role of a deacon, than serve the body with all your heart. Pray for the gift of helps, of mercy those gifts that’ll help you excel in that office. Teaching, that seems fairly self explanatory, be it with the youth group, children’s ministry, or corporately, congregationally, or home study, bless the body with the gift God has given you.

Exhortation, or encouragement, this is the gift that motivates us to place in the practice the principles we’ve learned. and As a Pastor, I need a healthy dose of this gift, pray for me, because to be well fed, but not motivated to place it into practice, just fattens up the sheep, it’s not healthy to just grow fatter and fatter awaiting the wolf to come in and stalk his prey. But to heavily exhort with out teaching, causes all kinds of activity, with no depth or understanding as to why they’re doing what they’re doing. So there needs to be a healthy balance there.

Giving, didn’t know that was a gift did ya? Now some of you are thinking, “Now I feel better, pastor I just don’t have that gift!” But we’re not talking here about the tithe, or the heart of God in giving in general, God so loved that He *gave* and as God lives in us we’ll be givers in general. But there are those upon whom God pours out His Spirit in such a way as to bless the body by giving so as to further the agenda of God’s work upon the earth. and You may’ve been feeling led this way, and doing this not even realizing that it was a special gift that God had entrusted to you.

These people generally seem to have the Midas touch, they're always making money hand over fist, and now you know why, it's because God has blessed you, that you might be a blessing to the Body. and It's not uncommon that when these folks cease giving, their resources begin to dry up, if they're not going to be a channel through whom God can flow in that way, He'll find someone else through whom He can. So Paul says if your gift is in giving, do it with liberality, abundantly, let God flow through you incredibly.

Leading, with diligence, if God calls you to be an overseer, don't get discouraged, lead with diligence, discouragement is often a struggle for overseers, because can be difficult working with people, passing on the vision, seeing people not follow through or whatever. Paul says don't get discouraged, or give up, lead diligently.

Showing mercy, gladly, and again this isn't the general mercy that we're all called to share and to show, being kindly affectionate to one another. This is that gift of benevolence, when someone is in the hospital, you can't not go see them, when someone has experienced a death in the family, you're going to be there for them, this guy, this gal is all about the needs of others, above and beyond measure.

You see, what's the bent of your heart? In serving, giving, being there to meet needs, expounding God's Word, or expanding God's Work? and You begin to discover the way God has gifted you, stir it up, that's what Church membership is all about, not isolation, but involvement in the body of Christ.

Prayer Points: God we thank You for making us members of the church, of the body of Christ, help us Lord to function in the capacity to which You've called us, to think soberly concerning that, not take on more, but not do any less. We want to serve You to the full, help us to catch the vision of being active, and involved however you may want to use us to bless others. and If we've somehow neglected the gifts You've given us, help us to stir them up once again, renew us, restore us, refresh us by Your Spirit, that we might not be a hindrance to what You want to do, but a help, a blessing, not a burden, for Your glory, and for Your names sake.

Before you can know where you fit into the body, it's essential that you be a member of the body. How do you become a member, by giving your heart and your life to Jesus Christ So if Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart, don't harden your heart, open your heart, call upon the name of the Lord and you'll be saved.