

When in Rome: Body Parts

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[0:00] Now, as a pastor, when you come into your congregation and people say, oh, I'm surprised to see you here. I think, did I get fired? Have I been let go and missed the email or the text? No, I didn't think so.

But it turns out people thought I was not here this Sunday. So, my news of my demise has been greatly exaggerated. I am going on vacation, but not yet.

So, after today, I will be on vacation back preaching on August 23rd. So, Dr. Jerry Shepard will be our guest on July 26th.

Brad Baker, who you've also met before, will be preaching August 2nd and 9th. I don't see anybody taking notes, so you'll be surprised. And then Dr. Shepard will be back preaching on August 16th.

We're having communion. Now, nobody panic. Baptists have to have communion on the first Sunday of the month, but not in August. So, Dr. Shepard will lead communion on August 16th.

[1:05] So, that's when we'll have communion together. Contact one of the elders if you need any prayer support or other support while I'm away. Some of them are on vacation too, so it'll be like throwing a dart.

But, yeah, we have lots of elders who will be available. The church office will be closed July 21st and 28th, and August 4th, 11th, and 18th.

So, just to know. The church email and messages left on the church phone will be responded to as normal, just not from here in the church. Another thing, the newsletter will be pre-scheduled to come out on Thursdays at 2 p.m. on the weeks I'm away.

In past years, I've been the only person to do it. So, this year we're able to do it, and it'll be pre-scheduled to come out while I'm away. There won't be a financial update in the newsletter that comes out until August 27th.

So, there's a few weeks where you'll just have to wonder. But it's all good. Sermons on the phone and the website will not be updated while I'm away, because I'm the guy who does that.

[2:12] All right, I think that's it. That's a lot. There'll be a quiz at the end of the service. Will you pray with me this morning?

Gracious and loving God, as we enjoy the warmth and beauty of summer and the precipitation as well, we pause to thank you for the many blessings that you have poured into our lives.

In the sunshine, the flourishing living things, laughter of family and friends, the gift of rest, we see reminders of your goodness and faithful care.

Father, help us to not rush through these days of summer, but to take time to reflect on your grace.

Open our eyes to recognize your hand in both the ordinary and the extraordinary.

Fill our hearts with gratitude. Renew our strength. And deepen our trust in you. May this season draw us closer to you and inspire us to share your love, your kindness, and your hope with those around us.

[3:22] Father, keep us safe in our travels, near or far. Refresh our spirits and remind us each day that every good gift comes from you.

We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord. Amen. Welcome here for this Sunday, July 19th, 2026.

My name is Kent Dixon, and yes, I am still here. And yes, I'm the pastor. So this morning we're continuing in our sermon series that we've been going through for weeks now, several weeks.

When in Rome, and what we're doing is we're making our way through the book of Romans. For anyone who's visiting or here this morning, we've been working our way through the book of Romans, uncovering some of the timeless truths that it holds that were as true when Paul wrote them as they are today.

They're still true today and applicable. We've been looking at that together. Our passage for this morning is Romans 12, verses 3 to 8, which says, go ahead and turn Romans 12, 3 to 8 in your Bibles, or as always, I can give you the audiobook version right here.

[4:31] For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith. If it is serving, then serve.

If it is teaching, then teach. If it is to encourage, then give encouragement. If it is giving, then give generously. If it is to lead, do it diligently.

If it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. As I was thinking about this this week, it's hard for me. You've heard me tell this story before, but when I was little, even littler than now, believe it or not, I was in a Christmas production at our church.

[5:46] I think it was Christmas. And very small church, very low stage. And so I was six, maybe, maybe younger. And I was right at the front corner, and I had one line.

And I had to quote scripture. And I was terrified. And I said, God loves a cheerful giver. The entire congregation laughed.

I did not. But my parents said, it was the delivery man. And I said, well, fair enough. But yeah, when I hear that, do it cheerfully. I have to laugh.

God is winking at me there. So our sermon this morning is titled Body Parts. I thought it was a little bit fun. I was going to call it Body Functions, but I thought that was a little more tricky.

So if you read the title in the newsletter, maybe you came this morning expecting a biology class or, heaven forbid, an anatomy class. But that's not what we're after this morning.

[6:46] We find Paul expressing several principles related to the church in this passage. You know this. Scripture refers to Christians as being one body in Christ.

And as one body, we're still individual members of that body. Various members of the body don't all have the same function. And we should function in whatever way God has given us both the ability and the gifting.

So it's probably safe to say that for every one of us, we've likely asked a question one or more times in our lives. Where do I fit in the body of Christ?

Or even in the body of believers in this place. So what is my function in the body of Christ? How can I determine what functions or gifting I may have?

And as I was thinking about this, have you ever done a spiritual gifting assessment? Probably lots of you have. Did you ever use it? Were you ever encouraged to put it into action?

[7:52] Or did you just go, yeah, apparently I'm a dishwasher. Excellent. So do you wash dishes? Do you serve in the way that that's been identified? It may be helpful if you consider it in terms of a vocation.

This is kind of what I was thinking about. There's lots of tools and thought processes for determining a person's aptitude or gifting. Again, when you were in a job interview, did you get asked to take a personality assessment?

I've had to do that. So it also helps in considering the vocational direction that might best suit those things. So when your skills and abilities are uncovered, as well as your personal interests, those could come into play as well.

So these same principles, I believe, can help us determine what our functions might be within the body of Christ. So for example, when someone is thinking about choosing a career path, one thing they do is read job descriptions, right?

I know pastors who occasionally do a little Google search. Where could I go next? Don't panic.

That's not what I'm doing on my vacation. So let's examine these functions that Paul lists in our passage this morning.

[9:10] And some of them are probably familiar. Likely this entire passage is familiar to you. So let's examine these functions together this morning. First, let's consider the function of prophecy.

And if your spiritual gifting is prophecy, maybe you already knew I was going to say that. So I'm using a tome called Vines Expository Dictionary for some of our definitions this morning. And if you want some light reading, you can check it out. Vines defines the Greek word propheteia as the speaking forth of the mind counsel of God.

Sounds heavy, right? A little bit. So originally, this referred to the gift of the Spirit by which one is inspired to reveal God's truth. So today, the service or the calling that's most like prophecy, I think, is preaching.

So you're getting some of that this morning. When someone preaches, ideally, they're proclaiming the counsel of God as it has already been revealed.

[10:19] So nothing I say to you when I preach is new. You can read most of this for yourself. Now, I apply some things, some life experience things, some insights that God has given me to things.

But you could read this and receive God's counsel as well. So preaching just gives you an opportunity to have a different perspective and ideally some application. Preaching should reveal God's truth to us or at the very least remind us of it.

And then, as I touched on, suggest practical application for our lives. Preaching should also be about God's truth, not the preacher's personal opinions.

Have you ever heard a sermon and thought, hmm, that felt like a TED Talk? Short, pat me on the head, send me on my way for a good week, don't make me feel too guilty, please don't talk about sin, and we're all good.

Right? That's not really preaching in my mind. So second, let's consider the function of ministry or serving. The Greek word diakonia means to serve.

[11:29] It's often used to describe any sort of service. So in 2 Timothy 4 verse 5, Paul instructs his protege Timothy to be diligent in carrying out the duties of his ministry and to even serve God in times of hardship, to stay focused on what God has called him to do.

Paul recognized and reminded people of the importance of serving God and serving others. In Romans 16 verses 1 and 2, Paul writes to the Roman church about Phoebe, identifying her role as a deacon and asking the people to support her in her ministry.

So we can see that the ministry of serving is also related to a specific role in church leadership. And you probably see it coming a mile away. In a more official capacity, it's used to describe those qualified and appointed to serve as deacons.

Third, let's consider the function of teaching. It may seem obvious, but this is related to instructing others about God's word. In some ways, this is also, you can see it, related to preaching.

So ideally, when you receive a sermon, it's not just information communicated to you and you go, huh, oh well, roast is in the oven. But there's some application there, right?

[12:58] There's some insight given. There's some thought process to encourage you to dig deeper. So in my mind, it's pretty hard to preach properly and especially effectively without teaching people at the same time.

So if you're taking notes, you're going to see that lots of the gifts that Paul talks about, or lots of the callings that Paul talks about, are related to being a pastor, especially a teaching and preaching pastor.

So, but still, there's some variations to this function. You may remember from our series in Acts, Priscilla and Aquila heard Paul speaking in the synagogue.

Remember that? And then they invited him to come and teach in their house, in this private, close environment of likely a small group of people. So we can see private teaching throughout the New Testament.

And Jesus often taught one-on-one or to small groups at times. You know, we hear about the feeding of the 5,000. We think of those huge events. But Jesus also taught one-on-one and taught to smaller groups.

[14:04] Titus 2, verses 3 to 5 says, Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.

Then they can encourage the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home. I didn't write that. To be kind and to be subject to their husband.

I didn't write that either. So that no one will malign the word of God. So there we can also see that older women have been given a role. They've been instructed, encouraged to pass on what they've learned to younger women.

James, speaking in the book that fortunately bears his name, says in chapter 3, verse 1, Not many of you should become teachers.

Interesting. My fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. I've told this story before.

[15:08] Maybe you remember it. Hopefully you won't. As I remember my dad telling stories over and over, it's something that plays in my head. Did you tell this story? Did you tell this story to this person or this audience?

So I need to make sure. But anyway. I remember being in a seminary course, and we talked about this. We talked about the weight of the calling of being a pastor.

The weight of a calling of preaching or teaching the word of God. And so I went to my instructor at the end of the class, probably looking a little more pale than usual.

And he said, what's up? And I said, this is terrifying. And he said, why? And I said, because preaching and being a pastor and leading a congregation in a spiritual guidance sort of way feels like a lot of, not pressure, but a lot of really serious responsibility.

And scripture talks about, maybe you know this, maybe you don't, talks about the judgment for people who lead people astray. And so he smiled a little bit, and he said, can I encourage you?

[16:15] And I said, yeah. And he said, Dixon, the fact that you're even thinking that way, you've got no problem. I said, all right, I will write my own Bible, and we'll take it from there.

So it's made clear there, though, that not all Christians are called or gifted to be teachers. Those who teach others, as we just talked about, are held to a higher standard and more accountability. My conversation with Jesus may be challenging in other ways than yours at the end. Fourth, let's consider the function of exhorting.

We don't use that word very often. So let's call it building up. This is the ability to build people up and strengthen them, encourage them, to encourage brothers and sisters in their own calling, their own gifting, or even in their daily walk with Christ.

Some may do this publicly, right? Sometimes pastors do this, talk about encouraging, leading you into your week with encouragement and energy and challenging you to think about important things.

[17:28] It's a calling of preachers and teachers, for sure. Hebrews 3, verses 12 and 13 gives us another perspective on this, though. It says, See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

But encourage one another daily, it says, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Some people who are called to exhorting or building up other people, I refer to them as encouragers. My mom was an encourager.

I have lots of friends who are encouragers. So they intentionally and effortlessly pray for others, and they take any opportunity to bring light, to bring joy, to bring hope into someone else's life.

Fifth, let's consider the function of giving. This is not the part where I say, dig deep. Some people find themselves, though, abundantly blessed.

[18:35] And that doesn't just mean financially. Maybe financially. Maybe they've been blessed with skills and abilities, or available time, or in other ways that they can then use those things, those blessings from God, to bless other people.

2 Corinthians 9, verses 10 and 11 says, Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

God may bless some with far more than they need themselves, so that they can then in turn engage their calling to be a tangible blessing to other people.

Does that make sense? Six. Let's consider, there's 23 of these, by the way. Six. Let's consider the function of leading, which is shepherding.

[19:44] And again, what do you hear here? Pastor. I did a pastoral practicum as part of the end of my master's.

And so I was working with a pastor at a church and did some preaching, did some other things, did some congregational care, lots of different things. And I didn't want to be a pastor of a church. I've told you this before.

I didn't feel that that was where God was calling me. I didn't feel that that was where God was calling me. So at the end of my practicum, I went to him and I said, okay, Micah, Micah, funny, right?

Tell me what you perceive. And I said, and he said, you ready? And I said, yeah, I guess so. And he said, good preacher, easily pray for people, good with people, kind, soft-hearted, prayerful, clearly love God.

And I said, he and I were good friends at this time. And I said, so? And he said, pastor, pastor, pastor, pastor, pastor.

[20:53] And I said, rats. And he said, that's what I get anyway. And I said, well, I'm sorry I asked. So in Paul's list, though, this idea of leading or shepherding people refers to the work of elders or pastors or overseers, church leaders, or even people within the congregation who have that gifting.

People who can lead a Bible study, for example, or a prayer group or some sort of a study or even leading events. Those are all leadership kind of skills and experiences.

Hebrews 3, verse 17 says, have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.

Hear that part? It's not, you're not submitting because this person wants power or control over you, and actually their accountability for being in leadership over you, that's something they have to bear, not you.

It goes on there to say, do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

[22:08] Men and women who are called to lead, whether in vocational pastoral ministry or other church leadership roles, quite literally have the responsibility of watching out for the souls of people God has called them into leadership of.

1 Timothy 3, 1 and 7, these are the pastoral job description passages that we often see in church postings. 1 Timothy 3, 1 to 7, Titus 1, 5 to 9, those passages give specific qualities for anyone God has called to serve in leadership.

And I'm not kidding, you can see a pastoral job posting, and they will say, need you to preach, need you to whatever. This person, the successful candidate, will have the qualities of 1 Timothy 3, 1 to 7, the qualities of, and they're there and they're important, but they're not everything.

So seventh out of 23, no, seventh and last on Paul's list this morning, let's consider the function of showing mercy. It also means loving people, that's what it comes down to.

And perhaps this service is best illustrated in Matthew 25, 35, and 36. And we read there, For I was hungry, you know this passage, and you gave me something to eat.

[23:33] I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me in. I needed clothes, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you looked after me.

I was in prison, and you came to visit me. Bless you. Showing mercy can involve visiting the sick, visiting the dying, visiting the grieving.

That's a role that pastors do, but it doesn't have to be just the pastor who does it. Ministering to people in prison. I have not yet done that. I hope my congregants are never incarcerated, but you never know.

I do serve with the RCMP and chaplaincy as a volunteer, so that's adjacent. But activities like that, right? Ministering to people where they're at, and where their needs are.

So I doubt that Paul's list that we've explored this morning is meant to be exhaustive, because we don't read in that passage Paul saying, that's it, that's all, right? And Paul would be the last person to limit the way God works in people's lives, or the way he gifts or calls people.

[24:43] There may be other associated functions or roles in Christian ministry and service that aren't captured there. And particularly right now in my brain, pops in the thought that if you didn't hear something in there that resonated with you, don't panic.

That doesn't mean you're not called by God. That doesn't mean God has not gifted you. Hogwash. Because there are more things in heaven and earth ratio than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Got to quote Shakespeare once in a while. But Paul's list, though, I think gives us an insight into the fact that there are a great variety of functions in the body of Christ. If we were all praying just

exclusively, that was our calling and gifting, lots of stuff wouldn't get done.

And that's no offense against the prayers. If we were all fighting for the opportunity to come up and preach on a Sunday morning, I would give you the opportunity. But I mean, that's the reality, right? Is that if we're all doing exactly the same things, there are huge gaps, and we would notice them quickly. So there are a great variety of functions. So with an understanding of the kinds of service that are available, how do we know which role or roles suit us best?

[25 : 59] We kind of came back around to that. For us Braemarites, the majority of us have had years to discern and hone our skills, to identify God's calling in our lives, and then to land on things, ways of serving that suit our gifting, or our skills, or our abilities, or even our interests.

See, it's not wrong for you to say, maybe I'm called to do that, but it's not something that really resonates with me. That's okay. But as a career counselor would often suggest, it's helpful to explore the opportunities, to take advantage of learning opportunities.

There are always courses in teaching, or preaching, or evangelism, or other types of discipleship, that could help you explore and expand your interests and areas of ministry.

Talk to someone you know who is already serving in that area, and you can recognize their gifting in that area. If it interests you, talk to them about it. If something interests you and you want to learn more, ask someone who has the natural skills and gifts in that area.

Ask, in a pseudo-employment scenario, ask if you can shadow them as they serve in that way, to learn and experience more about what it means and how it's done.

[27 : 22] And even if it becomes clear that you don't have the gifting to serve in a particular way, you'll still have gained an understanding and appreciation for someone who does have that gifting.

Try serving in all the areas that are open to you. Now, we're a small church and a small congregation. We don't have 500 people and 82 ministries, but we have lots of things that we're doing.

Be willing to try everything you can. Maybe you have a talent you didn't know you had, and I'd love to explore those things with you. I'd love to encourage you as you seek those things out.

And you may learn, friends, that you have many talents, some of which you have never even tapped. And don't give up after the first couple of tries.

Failures may just be due to inexperience. You don't know what you don't know, really, right? That's true. And it may not be a lack of potential for you to do what interests you.

[28 : 24] Because it takes time and patience and effort to help us learn our true forte and calling. As you explore the opportunities that have been given to you, be humble and teachable.

Don't come in with your own expectations, but submit and recognize, I don't know it all. Be open to advice and counsel from other people.

Ask for advice. Other people are likely to be far more objective about you, guess what, than you are able to be about yourself.

Romans 12 verse 3 says, For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith that God has distributed to each of you.

Always seek to be humble. Always seek to be a collaborative team player who serves, and serves alongside other people. Don't let your pride get in the way of serving God and others.

[29 : 39] Other people may very well see our strengths and challenges more clearly than we will ever be able to see them ourselves. They'll also likely see where weaknesses or challenges are due to a lack of gifting or ability.

That's okay. Not just in experience, right? So over time, someone may come alongside you and say, Actually, you're not really as wired for this as we thought, I thought, you thought.

But hopefully you've learned, as I said before, what goes into that. And you can appreciate where others serve a little more. And keep trying. Keep looking. Keep seeking.

And remember, in all of this, the goal is for you to serve within your gifting and God's calling. If you are serving in an area where you're not naturally gifted or not called by God, you will be frustrated. You may burn out more quickly than you think. And it may not necessarily be you, but just a misalignment. But you may don't serve where you want to serve, right?

[30 : 50] Easier said than done sometimes. And again, it's important to serve in areas where you're interested. But that's not the only way to look at it. Seek advice and insight from everyone, especially from Christians who know you well, who have experience and unique insight into you.

It's important to recognize that no matter how old you are, how long you've followed Jesus, or how confident you can be that you have it all figured out, you can always learn from other people.

God will continue to shape you and challenge you to grow until the day you die. Just let him. The more diligent we become in examining these functions of service, exploring the opportunities to learn and serve in different areas, and asking for advice from others, the sooner we'll be able to discern our role and function in the body of Christ.

once we know where we fit, the challenge then becomes being diligent and committed to using the opportunities to honor God and bless others.

Friends, God wants us to join him in his plan to restore and renew all creation and to draw people into relationship with him and ultimately to receive the gift of salvation that he offers.

[32 : 24] We have a role to play. There is work to do. So let's be diligent in doing it as 1 Peter 4.11 says, with the ability God supplies that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

Amen.