

Grace That Grows Into Ministry

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Date: 14 November 1993

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[0 : 00] Will you now open your Bibles to Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 12, verses 1 through 8. Romans, chapter 12, verses 1 through 8.

Hear the Word of God. I urge you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

For through the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allowed it to each, a measure of faith.

For just as we have many members in one body, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

[1 : 19] And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly. If prophecy, according to the proportion of the faith, if service in serving, or the one who teaches in teaching, or the one who exhorts in exhortation, the one who gives with liberality, the one who leads with diligence, the one who shows mercy with cheerfulness.

Spirit of the living God, you inspired the Apostle Paul to write down these words nearly 2,000 years ago now. And we pray that in your mercy and grace, you will take these words off the page and please make them come alive in our minds and in our hearts as never before.

For we pray this in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. It seems that nearly every way we turn, the message is the same.

We are in trouble. Western civilization is in big trouble. Wreckage all over the place. Wrecked marriages, wrecked families, wrecked neighborhoods, wrecked souls, wrecked bodies.

Ernest T. Campbell, who's the former pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City, put it so painfully in a recent article. He writes, It seems that the Western nations of the world are on a downward slope.

[2 : 55] Great Britain no longer rules the waves, or much of anything else for that matter. The will to be free is more dominant in Poland than in France. The determination to work is keener in Korea than in Italy.

The commitment to learning runs deeper in Japan than in the United States. And then Campbell says this, My reading of the American scene is that our people are discouraged by the disintegration of this republic, which every day becomes more evident.

Like Rome of old, we are being eaten alive from within. In this time of great uncertainty, when it feels like everything around us is unraveling, what role is the church of Jesus Christ to play?

What is the church of Jesus Christ supposed to do? Answer? Be the church. Be the church.

Be what and who we are in Jesus Christ. I think a case can be made for the fact that we are where we are in America because the church has failed to be the church.

[4 : 13] God's redemptive action in history, God's redemptive action in the world, requires that the church simply be the church. Now, when you hear this word church, what images come to your mind?

What images do you suppose come to the minds of the average American on the street when they hear this word church? We use the word church to translate the Greek word ekklesia, which comes into the English language in words like ecclesiastical.

Ekklesia means called out ones. Ek, out of, klesia, called or summoned. The church of Jesus Christ is the ekklesia of Jesus Christ, the community of broken people called out by Jesus Christ, summoned together for Jesus Christ.

What images come to your mind when you think of us believers as the called out, summoned together ones? What are we?

Who are we gathered in this room? The New Testament uses some 96 different images to describe the church. 96.

[5 : 34] Images like the bride of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the family of God, the army of God, a colony of heaven, citizens of the in-breaking kingdom of God, resident aliens, stewards of grace, chosen race, royal priesthood, salt of the earth, light of the world.

Wow. Wow. That was only 12. Sometime I'd like to do a whole series on each of those images. But by far, the most common and the most complete image is that of the body, the body of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul uses this image 33 times in his letter to the Romans. Paul says of the church, of the believers in that cosmopolitan city, and us in this cosmopolitan city, that we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

We very different kinds of human beings are called out by Jesus Christ, summoned together for Jesus Christ to form his body in the world, to be his arms and his legs, his hands and his feet in the marketplace.

Now, where did the apostle Paul get the idea that the ecclesia of Jesus Christ is the body of Jesus Christ? He got the idea from the Lord Jesus himself.

[7 : 02] When? Upon his conversion. Remember what happened? Paul, then Saul of Tarsus, was on his way to Damascus to arrest those who were claiming that Jesus was Lord and Messiah and to bring them to Jerusalem to be beaten and killed.

As he approached Damascus, a bright light suddenly shone around him and he heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Saul replied, who are you?

And the voice said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Now, Saul had not set out to persecute Jesus. As far as Saul was concerned, Jesus was dead and those who believed in him were nuts.

On the road that day and in the light that day, Saul discovered that Jesus is very much alive and he discovered that those who believe in him constitute his body in the world.

In persecuting the church, he was persecuting Jesus. What you do to the church, you do to Jesus. What are we in this room?

[8 : 07] Who are we even after we leave this room? We are the body of Christ. Now, what does this mean in down-to-earth practical terms?

What does it mean for this grouping of humanity called GPC to function as the body of Christ in this city at this time in history?

In Romans 12, 1 to 8, we discover seven of what we might call dynamics of body life. What I'm going to do is run through numbers 1 through 5 very quickly and then focus on numbers 6 and 7. You've already learned by now that I don't put sermons together in any orthodox fashion. We'll use seven points today. In fact, let me tell you this. I have seven of these observations, the first five real fast.

I'll focus on number 6 and I have seven sub-points to that. And on number 7, I have a number of other sub-points. It's going to be crystal clear. All right?

[9 : 12] Seven dynamics of body life and what it means to be the body of Jesus Christ. Number 1, as the body of Christ, we belong to each other.

To be a member of Christ's body is to belong to every other member. You and I may not have chosen to belong to each other, but if we belong to Christ, we now do belong to each other.

We may not agree on everything. We may not understand each other, but that does not change the reality. Michael Griffiths of England says, the church is not the group of people chosen by me.

The church is the group of people chosen by God. We belong to each other. Therein lies the key to church unity, by the way. My right foot and left foot, my kidneys and my tongue, all belong to each other because they belong to me.

If you belong to Christ and I belong to Christ, then we belong to each other now and forever. About that reality, we have no choice.

[10 : 17] The only choice we have is what quality of belongingness we're going to enjoy. The quality of the relationship with Him and with each other. Will you say it with me?

We belong to each other. We belong to each other. Second, we need each other. None of us can go it alone.

There is no such thing as the Lone Ranger Christian. The human body is made up of many, many different parts, but each part is needed by the others. No part can function apart from the whole. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul works with this idea in greater detail. And there he addresses those who do not think they are needed and those who don't think they don't need anyone else.

He says to the one group, if the eye should say, I'm not an ear, then I'm not a part of the body. He says, that doesn't make you less a part of the body. What if the whole body were just this one big eye? Wherever the sense of smell be.

[11 : 16] Everyone is needed. And then he turns to those who don't think they need others and says, if the eye were to say, I'm not the hand, it's not any less part of the body, is it? We need each other. We cannot function alone.

I need you and you need me. Will you say it with me? We need each other. Third, we affect each other.

In the human body, what happens in one part affects the other parts. So too, the body of Christ. For good or for ill, we affect each other's faith and life in Christ.

A tiny hole in the tooth can affect my whole body. A nice warm cup of hot cocoa right now going down the throat would affect the whole body.

So too in the body of Christ. What is happening in one part automatically affects the whole body. John Wesley used to say that the religious experience may be deeply personal, but it is never private.

[12 : 23] What the Spirit of God is doing in your life will affect my life even if you cannot articulate it. What the Spirit of God is doing in my life will affect your life even if I cannot articulate it.

If you are resisting the Spirit anywhere in your life, it will affect my life even if you can't articulate it. If I am resisting the Spirit of God in my life, it's going to affect you even if I cannot articulate it.

The fact that we affect each other so deeply is one of the reasons why the prayer of confession needs to be a regular part of the worship service. A little leaven leavens the whole lump, says the Apostle Paul.

The sin of one member of the body can affect the quality of life in the rest of the body. We can keep the specifics of our sin from one another, but we cannot keep the fact that our sin is going to affect one another.

It's just going to happen. And the prayer of confession is a way of bringing cleansing to the whole body so that the Holy Spirit is free to build us up. That's how deeply intertwined we are in the body of Christ.

[13 : 30] We affect each other. Will you say that with me? We affect each other. Fourth, we owe obedience to the head of the body alone.

The human body works best when all of the parts are receiving their orders from the brain. Christ's body works the same way. It works best when all of the parts are receiving their orders from the brain, from the head.

And who is the head of the body? The pastor? The session? No. It's Jesus Christ. Christ. We can be the arms and the legs, the ears and the eyes and even the mouth, but no one of us is going to be the head.

Which is why, although we try to do things in the church in a democratic way, the church is not a democracy. In the church, the majority vote does not rule.

Jesus Christ rules. And often, He rules against the majority. He calls the shots. He sets the agenda. Which is why I've said to our leadership teams that our number one responsibility as leaders in the church of Jesus Christ is to discern the mind of the head of the body.

[14 : 41] To lay aside our agendas, our dreams, and our plans so that we may know His agenda and His dreams. It's when each part obeys that the body matures and grows.

Will you say this with me? We owe obedience to the head alone. We owe obedience to the head alone. Fifth, church structure changes as the body matures and grows.

Or, to put it differently, we are to design the structure to fit the body, not the other way around.

Every group of people needs some sort of structure, some sort of accountability system to do things decently and in order.

But the structure needs to be adaptable to a particular group of people at a particular time, in a particular city, for a particular purpose. I'm going to embarrass my son right now, but this past Halloween, as I went with David looking for a costume in which he could dress, I thought of the ninja

turtle costume that Sharon made for him four years ago.

It was a great costume. Remember that, David? But how silly it would be of me to ask David or insist that David wear this nice, neat ninja turtle costume this past Halloween.

[15:59] He can't fit into it. He's outgrowing it. It'd be very silly for me to ask him to do that, no matter how much I love that costume. Well, how silly it is to force the church into structures and programs which it has outgrown.

The church body changes and it grows and it outgrows, which is why I would suggest that every program and every institution within the church needs to have a termination date built into it. When that termination date arrives, we can then evaluate, is this thing still accomplishing its purpose? If it is, bless it and let it go on. If it is not, let it die, like I need to let that ninja turtle costume die.

Jesus says, no one puts new wine into old wineskins. What structures of GPC need to be changed? Which programs are really working?

Which are no longer working? What new ones need to be raised up in order for the body to grow at this time in history? The key question to keep asking is this, does the structure allow for the maximum exercising of the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

[17:15] That's the key thing I'm always going to be asking. Does the structure allow for the maximized exercising of the gifts of the Spirit? Which then brings us to the sixth dynamic of body life.

Are you still with me? I'm on number six, and this is where we're going to focus now. Number six. Each of us members of the body of Christ is gifted by the Spirit of Christ to continue the work of Christ in the world.

Say that again. Each of us members of the body of Christ is gifted by the Spirit of Christ to continue the work of Christ in the world. The word to underscore is each.

Each of us. Every one of us who belongs to Jesus Christ has been given what the Apostle Paul calls charismata. Charismata.

It's the word from which we get the word charismatic. Charismata simply means gifts of grace.

Every Christian has been given gifts of grace.

[18:19] Every Christian has been charismatized. In a way, you could say there is no other kind of Christian but a charismatic Christian. That's what it means to be a Christian, to be given charismata, gifts of grace, special abilities in order to function in the body and in the world.

How one is gifted and how one is given is entirely up to the Spirit. Let me say it again. Each member of the body of Christ has been gifted by the Spirit of Christ to participate in the work of Christ.

Do you believe that? Will you say it with me? I am gifted. Hesitant. One more time.

I am gifted. In Romans 12, 6 to 8, Paul lists seven such gifts. Now, I believe what...

I go down the line with the scholars who say that the gifts in Romans 12 are motivational gifts.

Motivational gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul lists what we might call manifestational gifts, ways in which those motivations are then manifested.

[19:41] In Ephesians 4, he has another list of gifts which I think are roles or functions in which those motivations might work. Each and every one of us who belongs to Christ has been charismatized by the Spirit of Christ to participate in the work of Christ.

We've been given motivations. Now, these motivational gifts are prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, leading, giving, and mercy.

Now, before I comment on each of those gifts, let me try to illustrate them for you. And what I'm going to be doing is building off of a story that is told by a man named Bill Gothard.

I want you to imagine that I have up here a box of cookies. And I walk across the chancel area and I trip over one of these speaker cords that lies here. I fall to the ground.

The box of cookies falls to the ground and smatters all over the place and it's this horrible mess.

Now, I want you to imagine seven different people witnessing this event. Seven people with these seven motivational gifts.

[20:53] The mercy person says to me, it's okay, Daryl. It could have happened to anyone and puts an arm around me. The leader person says, Joe, would you get a broom and dustpan and Judy, would you get some tape and tape down these cords and Mary, would you run over to 7-Eleven and get some more cookies?

The giving person will say, wait, I'll buy the cookies and by the way, here's a check for a new sound system so you don't have to have all these cords here. And, and, hey, wait, there's one more and, and, what are all these lights blaring in your eyes?

You can't see. Here's a new check for new lighting system. That's what the giving person does. The exhortation person says, next time, Daryl, you ought to walk in front of the pulpit where there are no cords instead of behind the pulpit where all the cords lie.

The teaching person among us will say, now the reason all of this happened is twofold. First, cords should never be left untaped, and second, the cookies should have been more securely wrapped and not just thrown in the box.

The service person among us says, here, I'll clean up this mess. And the prophecy person says, this is what happens when you're not careful. Do you see the parable in all of this?

[22 : 20] Electric cords are always lying across your path, and you need to be alert to the dangers in your life. Now, which of those seven responses was the most appropriate response?

Yeah. Which of these responses is the most Christ-like response? And I heard it in the congregation. The answer is all of them. All of those are ways in which Jesus Christ responds to the wreckage around us.

Read the Gospels, and you see Him operating in all of those ways. I think that a lot of the conflict in the body of Christ is due to the fact that each motivation thinks that it is the Christ-like motivation and judges the other six.

All seven are Christ responding through His body to the wreckage of the world around us. And we need to learn to embrace the other six motivations that we don't have.

Now, can I just take a few more moments and elaborate then on each of these motivational gifts?

Can I? Okay. Good. And as I elaborate on each of them, just monitor where you connect with them.

[23 : 33] First one is prophecy. This word literally means to speak forth. This motivational gift is the ability to speak a fresh word from the living God to His people.

It's not so much foretelling as it is foretelling. The operative word of the prophet is, thus says the Lord. Now, this gift cannot be exercised at will.

Those with this motivation, more than any others, have to wait. One gifted in this way cannot announce, well, at two o'clock this afternoon, come here and I'll prophesy. It doesn't work that way.

Which is why when you read the prophets, they all begin their works with, the word of the Lord came upon me. Came upon me. There's no control over when the prophet will prophesy.

Which means that the gift of prophecy is not necessarily the same as preaching. Sometimes preaching is prophecy. Most of the time, preaching is exhortation or it's teaching.

[24 : 36] Prophecy is a particular word at a particular time for a particular people for a particular purpose. It may be a word of warning, a word of comfort, a word of demand, or simply a word of encounter.

And when God's people hear this word, they know it is the prophetic word. Boy, how we need that gift to operate in our time. Service.

The word that Paul uses here is the word diakonia from which we get the word deacon. Now, although all the disciples of Jesus Christ are to be servants, I think Paul is referring to a special ability to serve.

Persons with this gift are very keenly aware of the temporal needs of people. If you have this gift, you're always aware of the need for tables to be set up or bulletins to be printed or accounts to be looked at.

People with this gift are looking for helping people with clothing and food and just all the tangible needs of life. I think it's interesting that Paul has this gift in between prophecy and teaching.

[25 : 39] I think it's his way of saying the gift of prophecy and the gift of teaching cannot work unless the gift of service is working. It doesn't happen unless the servers are there.

Thank God for the servers. Teaching. This gift involves the careful, systematic interpretation and application of the Scriptures. The teacher's job within the body of Christ is to impart information, to help people understand the Word of God spoken by apostles and prophets.

The teacher's burden is to help the church remain faithful to the truth. Clark Pinnock asks, why do we need theology anyway? And his answer is, because Christianity is a missionary religion and if we're going to get the message out, we better get it outright.

That's the burden of a teacher, to make sure that the church remains faithful to the truth. we need more teachers in our time. A lot more teachers. Giving.

All Christians are called to give of their financial resources. But what Paul is referring to here is a special gift of giving. Persons with this gift are motivated to give in a big way, usually anonymously. [26 : 51] There's a debate over whether or not the persons give their own wealth or they give the church's wealth, as John Calvin thought. I think it's the former. Persons gifted to give of their own wealth and resources.

Of course, such persons are the perfect persons to put in charge of the giving of the church's resources. Such a person delights to give liberally and hopes in giving that this be a catalyst to the generosity of the body of Christ.

The mission of Christ in the world cannot operate without these people. When I teach at Fuller Seminary, I tell the students, pray that somebody in the body has this gift.

If this is your gift, I encourage you to do it in a big way. To do it all liberality, as Paul says. It's a wonderful gift. If I had time, I'd tell you stories of how that works.

Leading. The word Paul uses here is the word which means to stand up before others. The person with this gift is motivated to step to the front of the line and get people going.

[27 : 54] The motivation of this person is to whip things into shape. It's the ability to graciously bring people and resources together to meet the needs of people. These kind of people are always asking, how are the programs, how are the activities, helping people connect with Christ and advance His kingdom?

We cannot make it without these leader types or administrators, as another translation has it. And then mercy. I think Paul saves this for last because it is so beautiful. Mercy is the key word in the three chapters before Romans 12.

The mercy of God is God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves and what because of our sin we do not deserve. Persons with this gift feel for and with people in need.

And they feel for those people in need whether or not the trouble was the person's own doing or due to some out-of-control circumstances. It doesn't matter why the person is in trouble to the mercy person.

All that matters is there's the need. If mercy people are working with AIDS victims, they don't need to know how the person got the AIDS. All they know is there's a person in need and their motivation is simply to be present like the Savior who is so full of mercy.

[29 : 10] Thank God for this motivational gift. Well, those are just some of the examples then of how the Spirit of Christ comes upon the body of Christ to enable each member to do the work of Christ.

We come then to the seventh dynamic of body life. We mature as individuals and as a body when each of us exercises our giftedness.

Paul says it best in Ephesians 4, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, according to the proper working of each individual part.

You are not going to grow if I do not exercise my giftedness. But I'm not going to grow if you do not exercise your giftedness.

You are going to be cheated if I do not exercise the gifts given to me, but I'm going to be cheated if you do not exercise the gifts given to you. You're going to be cheated if you ask me to do things for which I'm not gifted.

[30 : 13] And I'm going to be cheated if I ask you to do things for which you're not gifted. We are in this together. We grow only as everyone contributes. Will you say that with me?

We are in this together. We are in this together. The question, therefore, is how can I know how I am gifted? How do I know what the Spirit has enabled me to do?

I'll conclude with this. I'm going to offer you a number of helps. All right? All right? First, pray.

Pray. Pray. Ask the Lord to show you how the Spirit has charismatized you. Lord, what motivations have you built into my life? He is more anxious for you to know this than you are.

but he will not give the answer in a vacuum. So secondly, get involved with a small group of people with whom you can serve. It's in the community of service that our giftedness is manifested.

[31 : 22] Study more on the subject. Read all you can. Attend classes like the class that Lynn Johnson is currently teaching. Learn all you can about the other gifts. Fourth, ask yourself, questions like the following.

Ask yourself questions like these. When you look out at the world, what in your mind is the world's greatest need? Hopefully, you will say, to know Jesus Christ.

Okay. Of all that Jesus is and offers the world, what in your mind is the world's greatest need today? Is it for His truth, for His love, for His peace?

What is it in your mind? Another question. As you reach out to serve, where do you find your greatest joy? Where do you find your greatest...

Where are you turned on? Frederick Buechner says that we can discern God's call upon our lives at the intersection of the world's greatest need and our greatest joy. What does the world need?

[32 : 29] And where do you find joy? Another question. What do you want to see happen in the lives of other believers? As you look out at this assembly this morning, what do you want to see happen in these people's lives?

We're all going to answer this differently. Your answer is a clue to your giftedness. Another question. What bugs you about other Christians? Especially, what bugs you about Christian leaders?

I'm dead serious with the question. What bugs you about other believers? Your frustration will be a clue to your giftedness. And one more question. If money were no object and you knew you could not fail, what would you do for Jesus Christ?

Your dreams are a clue to your giftedness. So pray, get involved, study, ask questions, and then most importantly, present your body, your concrete self, as a living sacrifice.

That's the note on which Paul began his discussion of the church. Present your bodies as a living sacrifice. In Jesus Christ, God has given all that He is and has.

[33 : 46] And all that God asks from us is all that we are and have. All God asks of us is all. That's all. That's simple.

As never before, the nation needs the church to be the church. Ekklesia, called out by Jesus Christ, summoned together together for Jesus Christ to be His vibrant, gracious, breathing, growing body in the marketplace.

We belong to each other forever. We need each other. We affect each other at profound levels. We owe obedience to the head alone. Our structures and program will change as the body changes.

Each of us has been gifted by the Spirit of Christ to continue the work of Christ. And we grow and the world is blessed as each of us exercises our giftedness. So will you join me today in once again offering your body to the head of the body for the sake of the city and for the sake of the kingdom.

Will you join me in saying to Him, Here I am, Lord. All of me. Use me for your great purposes at this time in history.

[35 : 12] Amen. Amen.