

Humble Mutual Service

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[0:00] Good morning, church family. For those of you who don't know me, my name's Bec and we're going to get straight into today's Bible reading.! So if you can open your Bible or device to Romans chapter 12, and we're going to read the first eight verses.

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

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

[1:17] Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. If prophecy in proportion to our faith, if service in our serving, the one who teaches in his teaching, the one who exhorts in his exhortation, the one who contributes in generosity, the one who leads with zeal, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness.

This is God's word. Well, good morning, everyone. My name's David. I'm one of the pastors here. If you're visiting, it would be great to meet you after the service.

Will you pray with me as we come to God's word? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we depend on you for all things, and we just ask again that you would help us understand your word.

I pray that you would enlarge our vision of Christ and the beauty of what you've done for us and who he is, and I pray that you would help us to trust what you say here and help us to live it.

So we ask for your help for all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, what is so special about church? Some look for great music when they're picking a church.

[2:47] Some look for well-run programs, especially kids' programs. Others look for profound teaching or a strong leader.

You've probably got other things that are coming to mind. Like, what's so special about church?

And if we compare it to other organizations in the world, let's face it, compared to some businesses and countries, there's better organized, they're more productive.

Some of them, not all of them. But what's so special about church? Yet in Ephesians 3, verse 10, it says this, Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Heavenly beings are looking at the church and going, Wow, what is that that you have created, God? What makes the church special?

I think we're going to see it in our passage today. We're up to in Romans. Luke really helpfully took us through last week.

[4:10] Out of the mercies of God, we give ourselves back to God. It's in view of what he's done. His forgiveness in Christ, that when God looks at us, we are righteous in him, we're justified.

We have peace with God. We are being transformed into Christ's image. We are adopted, as Sam took us through this morning. We are children of God.

We are given his spirit. We are totally united to God. We have the hope of being glorified. We will be with God.

We will be together. The church will be beautiful in the new heaven and new world. All the mercies of God, and how do we respond? God has given all of himself to us.

We give all of ourselves back to him. Not because we have to, because just his love for us, we want to love him. And the first topic, the first concrete example of how we do that, that Paul picks is church.

[5:19] As we offer ourselves back to him, holy and acceptable worship will be a large part what we're doing right now.

Or not right now, but who we are as the church. What we're going to see today, we're going to see three main things. In verse 3, when we think rightly, when truth transforms us, we're going to actually think rightly about ourselves.

I'll find that surprising, but we'll come to that. Secondly, we're going to think of ourself as an interdependent one body of Christ. And third, the body needs the varied graces of God, and so we're called to use them.

So that's where we're headed this morning. Have your Bibles open. In verse 3, there's a play on the word think. It appears four times in this verse. As we devote ourselves as lifelong learners to God's word, as our mind is being transformed, it is surprising.

The very first thing Paul says, you're going to think differently about you. Everything he could have talked about, he focuses on you.

[6:37] If you have a changed mind, if your mind is changing, you will think more truly about yourself. I find that very surprising. It's not the only topic.

This is the start. The rest of Romans is really talking about how we worship God now. I'm not saying it's the only topic. But essential to the Christian life is how you think about yourself and how you think about yourself in relation to the church.

Paul appeals to his apostolic authority by the grace given to me. Now, there's two effects by saying that. First, he's saying, I'm an apostle.

What I'm about to say is really important. The second effect is, by the grace given to me. We see that phrase again in verse 6. In one sense, he's elevating himself.

In another sense, we've all been given grace. I say to everyone among you. Now, that's emphasised.

[7:39] Every single one needs to hear this. All of us need to hear this, not just a few of us. If, as a church, we all had great understanding of doctrine, if, as a church, we were all just using our skills and going above and beyond in service, could I suggest if we had all that and not verse 3, our service of God would be tainted?

It could be, at least. Maybe I should... It could be tainted. Not pleasing. I think often what causes division in an eldership...

I think our eldership is in a very healthy place, if anyone reads into my words. Often what causes division in an eldership or a ministry team is verse 3, I think.

There's a negative command and a positive one. Don't think. Do think. Don't think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

Pride. Jerry Bridges, in his book, *Respectable Sins*, he uses the analogy of a tree, of where sin comes from, and you picture the branches of, like, gossip and slander and boasting, but the tree trunk, where it all comes from, is pride.

[9:15] Highly thinking of self. Now, we're familiar with the self-exaltation, boasting form of pride. Like, we're all prone to it. But I think there's also an inverted form of it.

It's not a false humility either. That can be overly thinking of self too. I can't do anything right. No one's gone through the hardships I've gone through.

It's still inward, overly thinking self. Humility is, I can't remember the author who said this.

I'm borrowing some quote here. But humility isn't thinking less of yourself. Humility is thinking of yourself less, often. Paul is saying the gospel grace produces the joy of self-forgetfulness.

So don't think highly of self, whether that boastful form, which we can all kind of spot, but also the negative self-obsession as well.

[10:29] Don't think highly of yourself, but do think of yourself with sober judgment. Now, sober isn't this gloomy, serious, Christians can't make jokes.

It's not talking about that kind of sober. It's saying don't be intoxicated. Don't be out of control. Pride distorts our vision of reality.

Let me press the image a bit here. That phrase of a sound mind, a sound judgment, you also see it in Mark 5, with the demon-possessed man.

I'm not claiming we can be demon-possessed, okay? But the demon-possessed man, when Jesus heals him, we're told he was found to be of a sound mind.

He was out of control. When pride overestimates and focuses on self, either puffed up or self-pitying, we're out of control.

[11:39] Like we've lost touch with reality. Sometimes we're so down on ourselves that what we do for God, it's never good enough and nothing is acceptable to God.

I don't sense his pleasure in me. I'm not as godly as all these other Christians in this room. You've lost touch with reality.

Those self-assessments are not true. It's not a sound mind. But then your ego is flattered, your position in the church, or the ministry would fall apart without me, or I pray better than that person, I sing better, I preach better, I give more profound answers in Bible study.

I've lost touch with reality. We're not seeing ourselves right. We're out of our mind.

So how do we get a sound mind? How do we think of ourselves truly? Well, it's the second half of verse 3 there.

[13:02] Each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. Now, when I first read that, I confessed to my small group that I didn't know what it meant. Let's just move on to verse 4 because we all, we can all, okay, verse 4 we can understand a bit better.

Let's not do that because I think there's, I think, of course, all scripture is beneficial and there's often gold. When it doesn't fit in your head, that's where there's so much gold to be mined from it.

So what is the measure of faith? What is that? There seems to be two main options. The first is that given the context that we're about to go into of the different gifts, the different abilities, then some understand the measure of faith with just the different gifts, the different abilities.

Now, I'm oversimplifying that argument for the sake of time, but I think that personally I don't like that because the definition of faith, that's just stretching what that word means.

A second option, which I'm leaning towards this one, is faith is the normal meaning as we use it, that all believers are given, that we have faith in Christ, that faith in Jesus is the measure, the criteria to measure ourselves by.

[14:37] If you want an objective view of yourself, have a look at your faith in any given moment. I think this is great.

You want to have a look at yourself? How much are you looking away from yourself? How much am I... You want an accurate picture of yourself in this moment?

How much am I looking to Christ in this moment? How much am I looking to Christ in this moment? How much am I looking to Christ in this moment? Chapter 4, Abraham, we're told, he grew strong in faith.

Faith is often spoken of in the New Testament as it's organic, it grows. All Christians have it, we all have it, but we're called to grow.

It can be strengthened. I think to get our heads around this, I want to just imagine that Paul said, assess yourself by knowledge, knowledge of the truth.

[15:41] That sounds like it would be helpful. But then Paul Tripp, in his book to pastors, *Dangerous Calling*, he's got a whole chapter, and the title of the chapter speaks for itself, *Big Theological Brains and Heart Disease*.

We all know, knowledge is very important. We need our minds renewed by knowledge. We're all meant to be learners, lifelong learners. But if we made knowledge the criteria, that could lead to pride.

Another option is, what if it was the ministry fruit you're producing?

Assess yourself by the fruit of your service. That could be dangerous too. Missionary Friends shared an article, I know Dean and Rachel are here, but this is a, I'm going to mispronounce this Japanese word, which is why I'm spotlighting you right now.

An old faithful Japanese man speaking to missionaries, and he was asking, what are we aiming to be? A hero? Or a hero? Yeah.

[17:05] Fertiliser? Is that pretty close? Not really, okay. He's playing, are we trying to be a hero, or hero? Fertiliser.

Which one is your image of missionary work? Do you want to be poo? Or do you want to be the hero? The hero works alone, you're trying to get all the credit.

The fertiliser, you're just part of the process, and you're forgotten. If ministry fruit was the way you assess yourself by it, that too could lead to pride.

But if you look, if faith is the criteria, faith, looking away from yourself, that will give you a sound, sober assessment.

Now Paul is quick to say, give, that the faith is from God. And we're going to come to that. I really appreciate all the musicians leading us in worship of God.

[18:26] Like, I don't have a musical bone in my body, so I really appreciate you leading us. But your musical skill, all the effects, the fruit of serving this church, that isn't the best measure.

The best measure to look, is to look at the faith you've got. Am I depending on Christ, as I prepare this music? Am I wanting Christ to be the spotlight, as we sing, or am I wanting to be the spotlight? Am I worshipping Christ in my heart, as my lips are praising him? I think faith gives us, an accurate view, of ourselves.

If we bring faith into the equation, it can take us from pride, to self-controlled humility. And before we start thinking, faith is a reason to boast, we're to give the glory to God, as God has given to each one of us.

Now, I think we're uncomfortable. I'm uncomfortable with the idea that God might distribute faith in different amounts. But I think that's just our culture's, can I suggest that could be our culture's push on equality?

[19:58] Equality is our world's best attempt at unity, but it's just uniformity. Whereas God's unity of interdependence is so much more beautiful.

If we can get past the offence of equal amounts, it's actually, I think it's really practical.

When we see new or young Christians serving Jesus, and they don't get their doctrine quite right, do we go, oh, tsk, tsk. No, we don't.

We rejoice. We see the measure of faith God has given. Is it mature yet? No, not yet. But we rejoice, don't we? When we see older saints who their prayers, you're just like, wow, I want to depend on God like that.

We don't need to be threatened by it. God's given that faith, often through a lot of trials. We can just thank God for their faith and want to be like it.

[21:08] I think acknowledging that God gives faith in different measures, we're all called to grow in it, I think it's extremely practical. If we make faith the criteria of seeing ourselves, it destroys pride.

It will produce true humility. When we see it, we can give thanks to God for it. So then in verse 4, verse 4, Paul moves on to a way of expressing that faith, and it's in the church.

The word for there in verse 4, I don't think it's giving a reason for verse 3, I think he's just moving on. Here's an important outworking of faith. If you're filling your mind with faith, you will see the church like this.

You'll see the church as one body of Christ. If we're conformed to our Western culture that we live in, we're going to primarily think of ourselves as individuals.

We're going to prize and defend personal freedom. We're going to tie our worth to our abilities and our achievements. But if our minds are being renewed and our faith is growing, church isn't something you do or not.

[22:44] It's something you are. Verse 4 and 5 is not a command. Be, become one body, be one body.

It's stating a reality. We are one body. The body of Christ, no less. You have been purchased by the blood of Jesus.

You fully belong to this church, not by virtue of what you do, but because Jesus has made you his own. You are joined to him, so we're joined to each other.

Any ego of self-sufficiency or self-pity, that thinking needs to replace by true thinking of who I am. We belong to the Lord of heaven and earth and we are inseparable from one another. We are dependent on each other.

[23:50] If the sound guys turned off the sound desk right now, you wouldn't hear me. I need it. Please don't do that. If the cleaners and those who organise insurance for this building and all those who have given generously, we just couldn't be meeting right now.

Those who have been praying for this morning, I suspect all our efforts this morning would just fall flat if you hadn't been praying. Without the constant encouragement and instruction and correction and affection that you've shown me, I think if all that was taken away from me overnight, I reckon

my faith would likely just...

I'm not saying it would disappear, but I think it would be really malnourished. I think it would be really malnourished. The church needs organisation, but we need to see it as much more than an organisation.

We're an organism. We are... It's living. Jesus has created it. He's sustaining us. He's... He's among us.

The grace of God is empowering his church. Now, the unity spoken of here, it's a beautiful picture, is it not? The little toe is connected to the earlobe in my body.

[25 : 28] There is no one in here, in this church, where each member's one of another because we're joined to Christ. Now, this unity, it's bigger.

It's bigger than this church, I think. Over the holiday periods, if you visit another church that believes in the Jesus of the Bible, you will be meeting strangers, but you will have profound unity as you worship him together.

Like, haven't you... We've all found that. You come across a Christian and you've almost got more in common than biological family. So it's bigger than this church, but the way we give expression to it is we're embodied creatures to pick up.

We express it in this local church mainly. So the New Testament, it's got many metaphors for the church, like the city of God, the light on a hill.

We're meant to be a witness as we engage the world. We're a living temple. We're the bride of Christ. We're a flock under one shepherd. One body pictures up the interdependence of the functions in the body.

[26 : 45] So verse 6, having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. God is the source of this, of the graces, this empowering to serve him.

When we think of gifts, it can be God takes our natural abilities that he created us with and he redirects them in service of him.

But sometimes he creates in us abilities that go way beyond our natural temperament. And he's just like, how did you do that?

He has the ability to do that too. He even has the ability in the moment you need it, he gives you grace for that. Each one of us are given grace, not just a few.

The emphasis here is on the differences. We need the differences. This isn't an exhaustive list.

There's other lists in the New Testament. They're not exact. I don't even think together they're even an exhaustive list.

[27 : 58] I don't think these gifts are static. I don't think you should be going, which one am I? Different needs in the church call for different responses.

They can change over the years of our abilities and what we need. The point is, God knows what this church needs and he provides it. And it's not in equal measure.

And it's not the same function. The main focus in these verses is use them. Use them.

The body needs it. It's pride getting in the way if we have that thought, I wish I had her gifts.

That's special. That's pride. Just rejoice. God gave her that. It's pride getting in the way when leadership recognise that person's gifts and not mine.

[29 : 03] that's just pride getting in the way. If we rejoice in our Lord's design of the interdependence, if faith and love for Christ fuel us, we know that we're worshipping him.

Use them. Now, I see so much expressions of faith in this church. I thank God for you. Let's just keep growing.

Let's keep developing and using the gifts God has given. The body needs it. Let's fairly briefly go through the things listed here.

Now, prophecy is probably a tricky one, isn't it? What is that? Let me shock a few people.

I think prophecy happens in this church regularly. Prophecy is a revelation from God, but it never, ever carries the authority of Scripture.

[30 : 18] Never. We're called to weigh it. We're called to evaluate it. We're meant to assume there's going to be truth in it and error. It's never, ever on the same terms as Scripture, which is, I think, probably why we're rightly afraid to call it prophecy.

I think we're afraid to put it on the level of Scripture. So, I think, don't think of prophecy as predicting the future. Think of it as God-given insight into a particular situation.

I think we all know the experience when one of us, we're just sharing together what's going on in our life and it's a really difficult situation.

you're trying to discern God's will, what's going to please him. You're just really struggling or you're just paralysed, you don't know what to do or you're just paralysed by fear or something like that and a brother or sister just says something and it just hits the mark.

I think it's something like that. They may not even realise how profound their sentence was. They're probably not even realising this is from God but when it's just this surgical strike and it's exactly what you need.

[31:41] I think it's that sort of thing that prophecy is speaking into a particular situation. We need that. God gives that in his church but then the qualifier is do it in proportion to our faith.

Don't go beyond what you understand the gospel to be. Don't just spout off your opinion left, right and centre. Rely on God and speak what you trust will be helpful.

So that's prophecy. Verse 7 if service I think that's practical meeting practical needs in our serving the one who teaches which requires study and effort in his teaching the one who exhorts I think that's encouraging when someone just needs strengthening giving them boldness to act and believe what's the point of those second phrases in our serving in his teaching in his exhortation I think it's emphasising the way we worship is by using them I think for different reasons sometimes we can find ourselves just going through the motions in church in the past we've been on fire and just appreciating what Jesus has done for us and we're just looking for needs and we want to meet those needs and for whatever reason is going on in life we just see a need and we start thinking someone else will do that if you can meet practical needs express it in meeting practical needs and that's worship if parents you're called to teach your children express it in your teaching

I don't know how many people are in this room 120 50 I don't know over morning tea there's about 150 people who need encouragement we all need strengthening if you've got an opportunity take it the final three of these gifts that's talked about really emphasises the manner in which we go about it so giving money contributing money but not just money but other things as well like is giving money to church before or after tax that's a rubbish question isn't it I've asked that question it's a rubbish question if contributing do it

God wants generosity do it because the mercy of God it's an act of worship it's not a tick the box if you're leading a team or us as leaders do it with diligence fulfilling your obligation is worship serving your team members and letting them get the praise and protecting them it's do it with diligence and that's worship mercy the manner in which we carry out mercy should be with cheerfulness not because we just have to give money to that homeless person we come across there's a cheerfulness of being merciful like our heavenly father is merciful the body needs all the varied graces to build ourselves up into the likeness of

[36:14] Christ so what is so special about the church God is glorified in his unified church nothing else creates this unity you won't find humble interdependent God serving unity in anywhere else you won't find it in any religion any other religious group you won't find it in any company you won't find it in any club you won't find any family not the diversity expressed in unity you won't find it in any friendship circle you won't you can't because of the differences in the church and the humility and interdependence and the joy and just worshipping

God together that unity is amazing and I can't create it you can't create it it's only Jesus who creates it and it's the blood of Jesus he prays the night before he dies in John 17 his high priestly prayer to the father and he's about to go to the cross to make it happen the father is going to answer this prayer that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you have sent me and love them even as you loved me only Jesus can create this unity this humble interdependence as faith in Christ destroys!

pride as we rejoice in dependence on each other celebrating the importance of all the varied graces as we together voluntarily joyfully offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to him Jesus gets the glory in his unified church so that's how we can be a living sacrifice as the church whatever graces God has given you use them for his glory will you pray with me let's pray oh heavenly father increase our love of your church so that it's closer to your love of the church lord help us to be fueled by the hope of you promise to complete what you started that when you return the bride will be beautiful the church will be glorified help us to keep striving and being motivated by that day that's coming lord i pray that you would fill us all with increasing faith lord i pray that you would expose help us to celebrate each one of us among us giving praise to you for what you've given this church for our

good we thank you for your faithfulness to this church family over so many years and we just ask for your continued grace help us to do this for your glory in Jesus name Amen