

## SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation  
TITLE: "One Body in Christ"

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:3-8

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The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

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Have you ever paid close attention to how football actually works? It's not just raw athleticism. It has to include strategy, trust, respect, unity in purpose, and diversity in role, and the entire team has to buy into these things. If a football team is going to call a running a play to the left side of the field, the quarterback, offensive lineman, the wide receivers - they all have a specific task in making that play a success. They all have to block or move in a certain direction to open up running lanes on the left side of the field. And if one person misses a block or fails to execute, then the play collapses. But, if everybody does their part and carries out their task the way they're supposed to, a win is possible.

These ideas of being on the same team and working toward the same goal, yet doing so by having unique responsibilities, are a need picture for the church. In Christ, we are a part of his family. We're a team. We are unified. And we all have special jobs. One of the primary ways that the New Testament talks about these ideas is with the language of "spiritual gifts." Sadly, much of the American church has traded in a healthy vision of being on a team with distinct spiritual gifts for letting pastors and paid staff put on a show that they can go watch if they feel like it. The truth is, because of the gospel, every Christian gets the Holy Spirit, and then the Spirit equips every follower of Jesus with unique and detailed gifts that are needed by those around them. And thinking about these things isn't merely about how church can work best. These things are about function rightly as the body of Christ, about continuing Jesus' own life in the world.

So, how does Jesus' family work as a team? What does it look like to work alongside each other with a shared purpose, but distinct responsibilities in executing that purpose? In short, what's the deal with spiritual gifts? Paul addresses these things in Romans 12:3-8.

In this passage, Paul is writing to a church that is struggling with issues of unity. He's already written to them about what they all share and what they all have in common. So, here he emphasizes their differences, how they're gifted uniquely by the Spirit. And he starts by telling them not to think more highly of themselves than they ought (12:3). This suggests that the path to understanding and using your spiritual gift(s) is humility. Paul then goes on talk about how they are all members of Christ's body. New Testament scholar James Dunn writes, "Some people think that the body is one *despite* its diversity, but that is not Paul's vision. Instead, for Paul, the body is one *by virtue* of its diversity." And with these ideas, Paul is reminding his friends that their gifts serve a purpose bigger than each one of them on their own. And finally, Paul lists seven different spiritual gifts in 12:6-8. This isn't an exhaustive list because there are

other gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12-14 and elsewhere, but these are examples of how the gifts vary. Again, these differences don't detract from, but add up to unity and to Christ-likeness. That's how Paul sees it. In other words, the quarterback needs the offensive line, who needs the wide receivers, etc.

Now, Paul is very clear that all these different gifts of the Spirit are also free gifts of grace (12:3, 12:6, 12:6). And grace means that we don't have any excuse when it comes to figuring out, understanding, and using our spiritual gifts to point others towards the worth and beauty of Jesus. The same grace that forgives in salvation freely equips us in transformation. And learning to give our lives away with the gifts given to us gives us a more vivid picture of what God is up to.

So, it's clear that gospel-unity works by the Spirit uniquely furnishing each believer with gifts. That's how the church works together as a team. But how do we go about this practically? For the Romans, this was how Jew and Gentile harmonized. For us, this is the gateway to intimacy with God and each other. So, how should we pursue life as "one body in Christ"? Here are five suggestions:

1. **KNOW WHAT YOUR GIFTS AREN'T.** Realizing what your gifts you don't have isn't an excuse to be lazy, but a call to focus on how God *has* gifted you. No one from the offensive line should play quarterback. And that's not hurtful, it's liberating because it means you get to...
2. **DISCOVER WHAT YOUR GIFTS ARE.** Start with humility. Never forget that they're all gifts of grace. Surround yourself with people who will tell you the truth about how God's wired you and how he hasn't. And because your gifts will never be discovered in a vacuum...
3. **ACKNOWLEDGE THE GIFTS OF OTHERS.** If you can see God working in and through a fellow brother or sister in Jesus, call it what it is. Doing this will help you become more attuned to how the Holy Spirit equips and animates and brings life to and through the body of Christ.
4. **EXERCISE THEM IN COMMUNITY.** Don't forget, we are members of one another, and we belong to each other as we belong to Jesus. Whether it's a gift of teaching, serving, evangelism, or having mercy, the Spirit gifts people to work in, alongside, for, and to grow the body of Christ.
5. **AIM THEM AT CHRIST.** Some people are often tempted to think that their spiritual gifts make them important. The quarterback may be talented, but he's not the point. Yes, your spiritual gifts are *for* you, but they are not fundamentally *about* you. They are about Jesus. He's the point. Remember, this is about continuing his very life in the world.

And these above suggestions become natural reflexes when we look at the ultimate self-giving love of God in the gospel. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, we see the grace and humility and love that fuel our spiritual gifts, and thereby cause us to live well as Christ's body here on earth. It is the self-giving love of God in the good news of Jesus that Spirit is seeking to use in order to energize us into faithfulness. And when we each know and do our part as a team, the world has before them a glorious picture of Jesus.

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*For Discussion:*

1. Who is someone you know who you think understands their spiritual gifts and is using them obediently for Jesus' sake?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 12. How does what Paul says there help you think about spiritual gifts?
3. In what ways are you tempted to think too highly of yourself?
4. Personally, what stood out to you the most about this message?

5. What spiritual gifts do you think you have? Why?
6. How are you using them to point others to Jesus? How could use them more intentionally?