

Main Idea: In Romans 12:3-8, we see grace in action in the area of spiritual gifts. When grace is in action in our lives, it affects us in two ways.

- I. Grace should affect our minds (3-5).
 - A. It must impact the way we think about ourselves (3).
 1. There's a wrong way to think.
 2. There's a right way to think.
 - B. It must impact the way we think about the Church (4-5).
 1. Consider your body.
 - It's one body.
 - It has many members.
 - The members differ in function.
 2. Consider the Body of Christ.
 - We are one body.
 - We have many members.
 - We belong to each other.
- II. Grace should affect our ministries (6-8).
 - A. We have spiritual gifts (6a).
 1. They differ.
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 - B. What we have, we must use (6b-8).
 1. Your gift may be prophesying.
 2. Your gift may be serving.
 3. Your gift may be teaching.
 4. Your gift may be exhorting.
 5. Your gift may be giving.
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Make It Personal: Ask yourself three important questions...

1. How has God gifted me?
2. Am I content with what God gave me?
3. Am I using what God gave me as He intended?

We've been looking at some of the great grace passages in the Bible. Ephesians 2:8-9. 1 Timothy 1:12-16. Hebrews 4:14-16, to mention some.

This morning we come to yet another. This one talks not so much about what God's grace has done for us, but about what God's grace should do *through* us.

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1-8

Grace in action. That's what I've entitled this message. That's the effect God's grace should have on us when we've experienced it. It produces action, two kinds of action as we'll see. Yet God's grace not only inspires this kind of action, it makes it possible.

We need God's grace to be saved, and we have it. And we also need God's grace to live as a saved person ought to live, and we have that too.

Have you ever heard the accusation, "Why, he's so heavenly minded he's of no earthly good!"? No doubt, the world is full of people whose talk doesn't match their walk. But the truth is, when our minds have really been impacted by the things of heaven, it will show up on earth. That's what we'll see today as we consider Romans 12.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For another look at this passage, see the Romans series 1/11/98.

In Romans 12:3-8, we see grace in action, particularly in the area of grace-gifts, or spiritual gifts they're often called. When grace is in action in our lives, it should affect us in two very practical ways.

I. Grace should affect our minds (3-5).

When we come to Romans 12, we're coming to the bridge in the book. We've moving from doctrine to duty, from resources to responsibilities. In light of what God has done by His grace to make sinners like us right with Himself (chapters 1-11), here's what He expects of us, chapters 12-16, likewise made possible by His grace.

According to 12:1, if we've experienced the grace and mercy of God in salvation, we will want to offer our bodies to the Lord as living sacrifices. It is our reasonable service.

But what does a living sacrifice look like? In the verses that follow, Paul gives us a portrait of a living sacrifice. The portrait is drawn on the canvass of grace.

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you," Paul begins in verse 3. When he spoke, Paul didn't just toss his apostolic weight around. He was compelled by grace. He spoke because he'd received a grace-gift (a reference to his calling as an apostle). And his readers needed to listen because they, too, had received a grace-gift, as verse 6 reveals, "We have different gifts according to the grace given us."

Brothers and sisters, we are a blessed people, for God has redeemed us, but that's not all. He's also given us something very special, grace gifts, or spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts are grace in action in the Body. It's sad that a gift from God can be abused, but it can. Spiritual gifts can be a source of controversy. That won't happen if we allow grace to affect our minds in two ways, as the apostle explains in verses 3-5.

A. It must impact the way we think about ourselves (3). Verse 3 states, "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 measure of faith God has given you."

Notice that God is concerned with how we view ourselves. First we learn what to avoid, the negative.

1. There's a wrong way to think. What is it? It's to think too "highly" of ourselves. The verb means "to have high thoughts." Our flesh, which we inherited from Adam, loves to think very highly of itself. That's often why we get upset with people, because they don't share our high opinion about ourselves.

This inflated view of self shows up in a couple of ways. The most obvious is seen in the boaster, the person who loves to tell you how smart he is, how spiritual she is, how successful their kids are, or grandkids.

But being self-focused can show up in another way. Since we know people don't like to be around braggarts, we can do the opposite. We can deplore ourselves. We can put ourselves down, but it's often just another form of pride.

Here's how it works. You tell people how bad you are, hoping, expecting that they will correct you. "Oh, no! You're not like that!"

How do I know that's pride? Just agree with the person some time and watch their response. "You say you're bad? That's a problem, but through Christ we can work on it. I'll help you."

Friends, the church of Jesus Christ in America today needs to give serious attention to verse 3. We have been saturated in our culture by voices encouraging us to have a high view of ourselves.

E.g.—

The buzzword used to be co-dependency, and the experts said that if you think and feel responsible for people, if you try to please others instead of yourself, if you give to others, and if you find yourself attracted to needy people, you need help. Paul says the opposite is true. To think too highly of self is the wrong way to think.

2. *There's a right way to think.* What is it? Verse 3 tells us, "But rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

How are we to think about ourselves? First, soberly. That is, clearly, correctly, with an unclouded accurate assessment. We need to see ourselves as God's sees us. How's that? When God sees us, He sees that we are fallen, depraved creatures. As such, we're prone to have distorted, inflated thoughts about ourselves.

Thankfully, that's not all God sees. According to the first section of Romans, from God's perspective, we who know Christ are no longer in Adam. We've been united with Christ by faith. His Spirit lives in us. Sin no longer must master us. We have the power to get rid of our inflated views of self through the power of Christ. These are the terms we'll think in if we are thinking *soberly*.

Our thinking is to be influenced by something else, according to verse 3. Paul says, "in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." What does Paul mean by "the measure of faith?" He's talking about a standard (Gk. term *metros*), that's what a measure is, a gauge by which we are to assess ourselves. It's the gauge of faith. He's not talking about saving faith here, but the objective standard by which God accepts sinners.

Think this through. God accepts us, not on the basis of what we've done, but on the basis of what Christ has done for us. "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not by works, lest anyone should boast (Eph 2:8-9)."

There's why we have no reason to have an inflated view of ourselves. We are what we are, children of God, citizens of God's kingdom, all by the grace of God.

Beloved, we are not saved by works, but as saved people we need to work hard at this, at viewing ourselves from *God's* perspective, which is not natural. Affirming who we are in God's sight keeps us from two dangerous extremes. One is to think, "I'm indispensable. The church can't function without me." The other, "I can't do anything. The church doesn't need me."

A grace-perspective won't let either happen. When grace is in action in our lives, it influences the way we think about ourselves. It also affects our thinking in a second way.

B. It must impact the way we think about the Church (4-5). To make this point, Paul moves from his exhortation in verse 3 to an illustration in verses 4-5.

1. *Consider your body.* Notice verse 4, "Just as each of us have one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function." What's true of your body? We don't need medical school training to come up with this.

- It's one body. So it has unity. Yet...

- It has many members. So it has diversity. We have eyes, teeth, a nose, some toes, hands, a liver, some hair (in differing amounts), and more. We are very complex, and yet we have one body, right? And Paul notes something else about this body.

- The members differ in function. Eyes are great for seeing, but terrible for pounding nails. Ouch! It's true. Your nose works well when it comes to smelling, but

not so well if you try to open a door with it. Our Creator had different functions in mind when He gave us our body parts.

Just think about. Think about how God made you. Consider your body. Then...

2. *Consider the Body of Christ.* As Paul does in verse 5, "So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

What's true of us who are in Christ? What's true of this church?

- We are one body. We are a unit. A single entity. And yet, on the other hand...

- We have many members. "We who are many form one body." One, yet many. So there's unity, but far from having uniformity there is diversity. We're tempted to want the church to produce people that look like us, like sausages in a row. Not God. He made us different, as we'll soon see, He gifted us differently, and He gets much more glory when we pursue Christ's mission together, differences and all.

In fact, here's the mindset that's vital for that to happen. We realize and affirm...

- We belong to each other. The KJV of verse 5 puts it this way, "And every one members one of another."

Let that sink in. Yes, we belong to Christ, but in a very real sense we also belong to each other. I am yours. You are mine. We belong to the same Body. We have the same calling, the same identity in Christ, the same goal—to contribute to the good of the Body and the glory of the Head of the Body, Jesus Christ.

So there's the first effect of grace on our lives. When grace takes action, it affects our minds. We think differently about ourselves and about the church.

Let's take a little inventory. Fill in the following two blanks with the first word or phrase that comes to mind. I am _____. The church is _____.

What words came to mind? While you're thinking about that, let me read for you a story we heard this week at former President George H. W. Bush's funeral service, as told by his son, former president George W. Bush, in his eulogy.

To his very last days, Dad's life was instructive. As he aged, he taught us how to grow old with dignity, humor, and kindness — and, when the good Lord finally called, how to meet him with courage and with joy in the promise of what lies ahead.

One reason Dad knew how to die young is that he almost did it — twice. When he was a teenager, a staph infection nearly took his life. A few years later he was alone in the Pacific on a life raft, praying that his rescuers would find him before the enemy did.

God answered those prayers. It turned out he had other plans for George H.W. Bush. For Dad's part, I think those brushes with death made him cherish the gift of life. And he vowed to live every day to the fullest...

Like many of his generation, he never talked about his service until his time as a public figure forced his hand. We learned of the attack on Chichi Jima, the mission completed, the shoot-down. We learned of the death of his crewmates, whom he thought about throughout his entire life. And we learned of his rescue.²

That's such an important word. *Rescue*. It speaks of an event that happened to this man that shaped the way he viewed himself and lived his life from that day forward.

There were sixteen pilots in Bush's squadron. Half of them were killed or captured by the end of the war.

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/05/us/politics/george-w-bush-eulogy.html>

Bush was only 20-years old when the plane he was flying over Chichijima was shot down. The others on the mission were captured and executed by the Japanese or never seen again. He parachuted and landed in the sea where a US sub got to him before the Japanese could.

I watched the video of the rescue, perhaps you saw it. “Why had I been spared and what did God have in store for me?” Bush later told author James Bradley.³

So what words came to your mind? I am _____. The church is _____.

How about these words? *Rescued. And a special place to be.* As in I am a person who has been *rescued by the grace of God.* And therefore the church is *a special place to be because it’s what God used to rescue me.*

Friends, this is who I am. It’s my story. I have been *rescued by the grace of God.* I’m no longer lost in a sea of hopelessness. And the church is *the special life-raft that God used to rescue me, then nurture me, connecting me to others He had rescued, so we could together help each other in rescuing those still perishing in the sea of hopelessness.*

Is that your story? It that how we in this room have been thinking about ourselves, and our church? Grace should affect our minds. It’s why we need to sing songs about His grace often. *Tune my heart to sing Thy grace.* We’re so prone to get out of tune.

*Oh, to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee:
prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it;
seal it for thy courts above.⁴*

II. Grace should affect our ministries (6-8).

Grace starts by stirring how we think, and then how we live. Our minds, then our ministries. Do you realize you have been called to ministry? We all have if we're in the Body. We’re on a rescue mission, and we need everyone to participate if we’re going to do the mission as God intends.

Here’s what makes this mission possible, something very special the Lord has given to each of us who have been rescued.

A. We have spiritual gifts (6a). *Charismata* is the Greek term. *Charis* is the Greek term for grace. Spiritual gifts are literally grace-gifts. When God rescued us by His grace, He instantly gave us grace-gifts so we could partner with Him in rescuing others.

Listen to the beginning of verse 6, "We [that's the "members" of the Body mentioned in verse 5] have different gifts, according to the grace given us." Here we learn two important truths about spiritual gifts.

1. *They differ.* There are four places in the New Testament that teach us about spiritual gifts--1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4, and here. One thing apparent from each passage is that our spiritual gifts differ. They differ by divine design. For #2...

2. *They were given to us.* "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is *given to us.*" Question—how many Christians have spiritual gifts? Answer—all do.

³ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-george-h-w-bush-survived-his-brush-with-death-in-world-war-ii/>

⁴ “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”, by Robert Robinson

You have a spiritual gift. So do I. But lest we get puffed up about what we have, remember this. Our gifts were given to us.

You didn't earn it. You didn't deserve it. Just like your salvation, it's yours because of grace. And it's not yours to hoard, but to use for the good of the Body. As Warren Wiersbe observes, "Spiritual gifts are tools to build with, not toys to play with or weapons to fight with."

Let that sink in. God has given each of us a special endowment. It's more than a natural talent. It's a supernatural, grace gift. And these gifts aren't the same. They're different by design.

I think we all, at times, struggle with contentment when it comes to ministry. We may never say it, but we're inclined to think, "How come I can't do what he does, or she does? I mean, all I get to do is visit the sick. He gets to teach Sunday School. She gets to sing beautiful songs that edify the church."

If the members of your physical body thought that way, your doctor would schedule you for surgery. Many years ago the doctor discovered a large tumor growing in my mother's body. Some cells decided to deviate from the body's agenda, and formed their own agenda. Instead of contributing to the body, the tumor sapped the body. Instead of working with the other members, these rebel-cells worked against them and grew and grew.

So the doctor said, "Well, those cells have a right to express themselves as they wish," right? No way. He said, "That tumor must be removed." And it was, and mother lived many years after that.

Beloved, we who have been rescued by Jesus Christ have spiritual gifts. Every one of us. These grace-gifts were given to us with a purpose in mind. They are what makes the ministry possible that the Lord intends for us.

B. What we have, we must use (6b-8). In verses 6-8, the apostle mentions seven specific gifts (by examining other NT texts, the list of spiritual gifts grows to around 20). After listing the gift, Paul gives a directive on how the gift is to be used. As we go through the list, think about how God has gifted you. Notice...

1. Your gift may be prophesying. Verse 6 states, "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith." Paul doesn't give us a definition of "prophecy" here, but based on what he says in 1 Corinthians 14:3, 31, this gift wasn't restricted to prediction. In fact, it didn't primarily have to do with telling future events, but rather the communication of revealed truth intended both to convict and build up hearers.

Before the completion of the Bible, this gift apparently involved direct special revelation from God, which we no longer have nor need. According to 1 Corinthians 12 & 14, this is one of the best gifts of all. It comes from the Greek word meaning "to say" and derives from a root meaning "to cause to shine." As Ray Stedman remarks, "It refers to the ability to take the Word of God and make it shine." John Calvin described prophecy as "the peculiar gift of explaining revelation."

The person who exercises this gift is to do so "according to the proportion of faith." Use this gift trusting God, that's what faith is, to produce the effect He intends. Faith may also denote "the faith" or "basic Christian faith," indicating no one in speaking for God should ever deviate from what God has already spoken.

Some in the church have this gift, perhaps you. If so, it's to be used, make God's revelation known, that is, proclaim the Scriptures clearly, for God's glory and the edification of the rest of the body.

2. *Your gift may be serving.* "If it is serving [KJV "ministry"], let him serve." The Greek term for serving is *diakonian*. We get our word "deacon" from it. If you have this gift, you have what it takes to care for widows, to roll up your sleeves and do benevolent ministries, or perhaps serve behind the scenes caring for the church as a trustee or usher. It may be the same gift which Paul calls the gift of "helps" in 1 Cor. 12.

Again notice that after stating the gift, Paul gives a qualifier. "If it is serving, *let him serve.*" Fellow Christian, if your gift is serving, then serve. Don't feel guilty because you're not teaching. Don't be envious because you're not leading. Serve. Realize that God gifted you to do exactly what He wanted you to do in this church.

In other words, use the tool He put in your toolbox. If you have a hammer, you have something intended to drive nails. If a saw, to cut boards. We get that. Likewise, we each have a gift so we can contribute meaningfully to this local church. No one else in this church has what God has given you, and He intends for you to find joy in using the tool He's put in your box.

By the way, I'm convinced we don't need to guilt-trip people into doing ministry in the church. When we do that, we end up with people working in ministries for which they are not gifted. They'll eventually burn out. Or worse, they'll keep doing that ministry with a grumbling, discontented attitude.

And may I say this to those who lead ministries in this church. Be a team-player. Think about the whole body when you recruit workers for your ministry. Just because a person is a warm body isn't enough reason to coax him into serving in your ministry. Don't "rob Peter to pay Paul" just so you'll have the numbers you need. Encourage people to serve where they're gifted, even if it's not in "your" ministry.

3. *Your gift may be teaching.* Paul says, "If it is teaching, let him teach (7)." You see, the Word of God not only needs to be proclaimed, but explained. And God has gifted certain people to be able to do that. When they look at the Bible and then open their mouths, they make the Word of God clearer to the rest of us. If you are gifted in teaching, then teach. And you don't necessarily need a classroom to do this. You can use this gift after the worship service in casual conversation ("Did you understand what you heard this morning? Let's talk about it."). You can teach by meeting with a young Christian for a weekly Bible study.

This is a vital gift for the body. If we don't understand the Book, we won't grow as we ought, personally and corporately. I'm thankful for many in this church whom God has gifted to teach. If that's you, keep doing it...and look for new ways to do it. Look for people who are in need of the biblical teaching God has equipped you to give.

4. *Your gift may be exhorting.* The Greek term *paraklesis* can mean "to comfort" or "to encourage." It involves getting involved personally and purposefully in another person's life. So Paul begins verse 8, "If it is encouraging, let him encourage."

It's not just patting people on the back. This works hand in hand with the teaching gifts. Those with this gift help people apply what they've just learned from the Scriptures.

So a man is struggling to lead his family. What does he need? Teaching, yes. But also exhortation. "Come on, my friend. Let's put this into practice this week. I challenge you to do five practical things this week to show your wife you love her, and I'm going to ask you about it next Sunday."

There's a great need for the ministry of exhortation in the church. By the way, the person with this gift isn't the only one God wants to engage in exhortating and encouraging. But he or she is to lead the way and model for the rest of us how to do it.

5. *Your gift may be giving.* In the Greek text, there's one word which the NIV translates with a phrase, "If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously."

Did you know that "giving" is a gift? It means God will give you something to give as well as a desire to give it (Stedman, p. 116). Not like the man I read about who stood up in church once and said, "I want to give a hundred dollars--anonymously." If you have the gift of giving, you're in tune with needs, and when you give you don't make a big deal about it. Again, all of us are to give, but those with this gift model it for us.

I thank God for those of you with this gift. You give money and you do it so generously. You do the same with your time, and your home, and your car. When a missionary needs a place to stay, you're the first to volunteer. When a child needs a coat, you say, "How about gloves too?"

6. *Your gift may be leading.* Verse 8, "If it is leadership [KJV "ruling"], let him govern diligently." The Greek term literally means "to stand up before others." Who do you want to be in leadership positions in this church? People with business savvy? Not necessary. God's church is not a business. It's a family, a body, a spiritual house. And God has given to His church the very kinds of people He wants to lead it.

People who resemble His Son. People with a special grace-gift to direct His church.

Notice again how gifts determine ministries. A person with the gift of teaching should devote his time to serving, right? Wrong. It's not that the person is too good to hold babies in the nursery (and will do so at times), but the person who is gifted to teach should invest a lot of time *teaching*. So too, if you have the gift of exhorting, then get involved in ministries where you can motivate and move people into action. If your gift is leading, then look for ways to lead.

Many churches struggle with a problem. They have people clinging to ministries and titles and positions for which they are not gifted. But they've "always done it." If you're doing that, you're doing three things. One, you're frustrating yourself. Two, you're preventing the right person from serving where he's gifted. And three, you're hindering the church from functioning as the Lord intended.

It takes great humility to give up a title. That's why Paul began this section, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought."

7. *Your gift may be showing mercy.* Mercy is helping the weak and needy, particularly those who don't deserve the help (as if anyone deserves it). Mercy is demonstrating *mercy*, being merciful. It's the God-given ability to get close to people that others find difficult to relate to or even pull away from. Those with this gift develop ministries with the disabled (I think of Jeff Lybarger now serving with Joni and Friends), caring for shut-ins (I think of our sister Fox Etta), with those enslaved to substances and sexual sin (I think of those of you serving in the ministry of CRADLE), and those who take the hope of Christ to the jails and prisons.

Notice the qualifier, "If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." Not merely going through the motions. Not say, "Well, at least I visited the convalescent center! You didn't expect me to hug those folks, do you?" Do it with cheerfulness, God's Word says.

Grace in action. That's what we're talking about today because that's what grace does once we understand it. The rescued delight in rescuing others. Grace received leads to grace shared, and we do it with the grace-gifts that makes it possible, and God gets all the glory.

We've learned that when grace takes action, it affects our minds and our ministries. And that forces us to ask three important questions as we make this personal.

Make It Personal: Ask yourself three important questions...

1. How has God gifted me?

If you are a Christian, He has gifted you. Have you identified what He's put in your tool box? Do you know what kind of grace-gift He has given you?

"Well, I would serve the Lord if I could just figure this out."

Don't makes it too complicated. Start by looking for needs in the church and beyond. What needs do you see? Are you willing to do something about those needs? Then do it. Visit someone. Gift an offering. Listen to a child working on Scripture memory verses in Kids Club. Ask the trustee of the month if you can lock the building for him so he can go home early. Just start meeting needs you see.

Then ask yourself, which of the ministries you did most encouraged your soul? That's probably where you are gifted by God.

And take it a step further. Ask your brothers and sisters who see you serving what they think your gift is. Don't be defensive, either. Listen to them.

So start with this question. How has God gifted me?

2. Am I content with what God gave me?

Warren Wiersbe offers this assessment, "Nothing causes more damage in a local church than a believer who overrates himself and tries to do a ministry that he cannot do. (Sometimes the opposite is true, and people undervalue themselves. Both attitudes are wrong.)

Suppose you gave your children some beautifully wrapped gifts. Imagine how you'd feel if they took those gifts, put them in their rooms under the bed, unopened, and left to play acting as though the gifts didn't even exist. How do you think God feels when we ignore His gifts, and refuse to use them in the ministries of His church, or when we complain about His gifts?

My brother and sister, God gave you exactly what He wanted you to have. Are you content with it? Are you content to serve in the ministry where you are gifted, or are you bitter because you can't do something else?

Would you thank Him right now? Stop and thank the One who saved you by His grace for also giving you a grace-gift.

3. Am I using what God gave me as He intended?

Again, let's be honest. It's possible that some of us are in ministry positions that we shouldn't be in because God has not gifted us for them. It's even more likely that some of us are gifted for ministries that we are not doing.

Let's use what we've received. Let's do it as soon as this service concludes. Let's choose today to let grace take appropriate action in our lives, for the glory of the Giver of the grace. We'll never regret it.