

Sober Judgement

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[0:00] I'd like if you have your own Bibles to open up to Romans chapter 12.

If you're using one of the Bibles that are in the chairs scattered around that we've provided for you, then you just need to turn to page 948. This morning we are picking back up in Romans chapter 12. I was gone last week, but we had started the first two verses and covered those. And so now we're going to begin in verse 3 this morning and work our way down through verse 8.

So I'd like to ask, I know you just sat, but I'd like to ask you all to stand in honor of God's Word as we read together. The Apostle Paul writes, 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.

[1:14] 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.

Thank you for this word, Father. We are grateful for the truth and clear instruction on how to live in such a way that we would honor Christ and point to the reality of the gospel.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. I know it's been a couple of weeks, but some of you might recall that in the first two verses of Romans, particularly in verse 1, Paul really turns a corner in this book.

And if you've been with us for the last couple of years, and you've walked through the first 11 chapters of Romans, and you know that we have encountered a lot of incredible realities that Paul points us to throughout this book.

But preeminent among all of them in binding this entire book together is the gospel that Paul preaches. The book of Romans really and truly is Paul's defense and definition of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[2:32] That's why he wrote this particular book. But in chapter 12, he turns the corner from primarily defending and defining the gospel to, as we have said, showing us what it looks like to live in light of the truth of the gospel.

He is teaching us and showing us what it looks like to live gospel-centered lives. And we saw in these first two verses of Romans chapter 12 that much of the gospel-centered life happens in our minds.

That the path toward practical godliness has very much to do with the ways that we think and how we apprise things and how we think about things and how we value the things around us.

Are we apprising things? Are we evaluating things in light of the truth of the gospel? Or are we simply going with the flow? Take a look back up at these verses because there's a strong connection between these first two verses here and what we're going to see in verses 3 and 4. Because if you'll notice, so much of what Paul says here, particularly in verse 2, has to do with the life of the mind. He says that we should not be conformed to this world, but we should be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

[3:45] That God is interested in transforming the ways that we think. He wants our minds to be shaped by the gospel so that we will be able to discern the will of God, he says.

So that we will be able to recognize, as we look at all the varied choices in our lives and all the things that confront us, we will be able to discern what things are pleasing to God, what things fit with God's revealed will in the scriptures.

How can we know? How can we be a discerning people? The answer is, not to be conformed to the world, not to think like the people and the principalities and powers of this present age, but instead to have our minds transformed by Christ and by the power of the gospel.

And then as we approach verses 3 and 4, we see that connection that Paul is going to go on all the way from now until the middle of chapter 15. He's going to show us what the gospel-centered life looks like and he's going to speak to some very practical issues in our lives and in the life of the church as a whole.

He's going to speak to some real things that we face. How should we think about our relationships with one another? How should we deal with others when they wrong us? How do we interact with the secular government?

[5:02] How do we do these things? And Paul is going to teach us and show us all those things. But he never leaves behind the fundamental truth that if we're going to be able to do the things that he commands us to do throughout these chapters, our minds have to be transformed.

So I want you to look in these couple of verses. I want you to look at how many times Paul uses the word think. Verse 3, he says, 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.

And even that word sober judgment has the same root to it as the word translated think throughout this verse. So over and over he's telling us we need to think in a certain way. Of course, he's already told us that our minds need to be transformed so that we can discern and know God's will. But now he's telling us, not only do we need to understand God and his will and his ways, we also need to understand ourselves. And just during when you look at, for instance, the writings of the great reformer, John Calvin, you would think that when he started what's known, what's his largest sort of, you might call it his theological opus, it's called the Institutes of the Christian Religion, which sounds intimidating, but it's really not that intimidating.

It's long, but it's not difficult to read. You would think that he would start off describing to us what God is like, or maybe defending the doctrine of the scriptures or something like that, but he doesn't.

[6:31] He begins that great work by saying, we need to know both God and we need to know ourselves. The first two sections are titled, The Knowledge of God the Redeemer. And then he tells us that we need to, but in order to know God the Redeemer, we need to have a knowledge of ourselves, those who are being redeemed.

And that's very much the pattern that Paul is following here. Paul is saying that we need to be able to discern God's will, but in doing that, we need to know who we are. We need to not apprise ourselves, think about ourselves in ways that do not correspond to who we are.

And not only as individuals, but as we'll see, who we are in the context of the body of Christ. Who are you in relation to the others that surround you this morning?

Who are you in relation to those who are a part of your local church that you are connected to? Who are you in light of your relationship to them? In fact, what we're going to see is a dual emphasis throughout these verses 3 through 8.

We're going to see a dual emphasis upon understanding who we are as individuals, but also understanding the unity that we have with others. So that Paul is going to emphasize the diversity that exists among us because we're going to see clearly that we're not all the same and we're not intended to be the same by God, but we're also going to see that there is a fundamental unity that we share despite all of that diversity.

[7:54] So let's look quickly at what Paul says about the fundamental unity that we share because most of what he says goes to the issue of diversity within the body. But I want you to see quickly that this diversity happens within the context of unity in the body of Christ.

So take a look quickly. He says in verse 4, as in one body we have many members. So many members is diversity, but we are one body.

That's essential to understand. And he clarifies what he means by that in verse 5. He says, so we though many are one body in Christ. The fundamental unity that we share is a unity that we have because we are all of us through faith in Christ.

We are connected to him. We are united to him to carry the body image further in the ways that he uses it in his other letters. Christ is the head and we are the varied members.

But we're all part of the same body. All guided and directed by our leader and head, Jesus Christ himself. Which means that nothing that Paul says in these chapters applies to you if you're not a part of the body of Christ.

[9:06] Nothing that he says is going to impact you or really change you or help you to become the kind of person that you know you ought to be if you are not first in Christ.

Understand this clearly. If you have not repented of your sins, entrusted in Christ, and believed the gospel that Paul has labored to describe for us through this letter, if you have not done that, then you're not in Christ and you do not have the hope of eternal life.

And the great unity in the midst of diversity that we see here that we ought to long for cannot be yours unless you trust in him and turn from your sins.

Nothing else that I say this morning will matter for you if you are not in Christ and you can only be in him if you are united to him by faith in him alone and his work on the cross.

But if you are united to Jesus, if you have him as your head and if you are a member of the body of Christ, you need to treasure this morning the unity that you have because there's great diversity among us.

[10:09] I mean, you guys, even I look around here and you look different. Some of you are pretty good looking. Some of you are kind of funny looking, right? Even physically, you're just different. We're all different ages. But even beyond that, there are real differences among us.

In order for those differences not to overwhelm us and pull us apart and separate us, we need to begin with the unity that we have in Jesus. Because when somebody in the church upsets you, that will fester and grow unless you first remember, yeah, but they're a member of the body too.

They're a member of the body too. And they love Jesus in the same way that I love Jesus. And so maybe they've wronged me. Maybe I've wronged them.

Maybe there's some tensions at times within the body. And those tensions will rip us apart though if we don't start with saying, never mind the tensions, never mind the disagreements we have with one another at times.

We are one in Christ. We serve the same master. And therefore, whatever happens among us, it has to be smoothed out by recognizing that we have the same head and we serve the same Lord.

[11:24] But the diversity is great. But it's not only great, it's also good. It's not a matter of that God has to deal with the fact that different kinds of people make up the body of Christ.

No. What we're going to see throughout this passage is that God intends for there to be diversity within the body of Christ. And in fact, God is ultimately responsible for the diversity that exists within the body because He is sovereign over all things, including us.

So there are three ways in which Paul highlights the diversity that you can see as they're laid out here very clearly. You can see the first one there where God says, where Paul says in verse 3, at the end of verse 3, that each of us has a measure of faith that God has assigned.

That God has apportioned out to each of us a measure of faith and that measure of faith is not the same for everybody. So we differ in the measure of faith that God grants to us.

And then he also says in verse 4 that the members of the body of Christ, that's us, that we do not all have the same function or we do not all perform the same actions within the body of Christ.

[12:39] So there's diversity in the amount of faith that God assigns to us. There's diversity in our function within the body of Christ. And then you can see the third one there in verse 6. He says that we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.

A difference in the amount of faith apportioned to us. A difference in the way that we function, the activities that we perform within the body. And then a difference in the gifts that God assigns to us. And so I want us to break these down and think about these a little bit and try to apply these truths to us this morning.

But I want to do it in the reverse order because I feel as if for most of us, and this may not be true for all of us, for most of us, we are most familiar with the concept of us all having different gifts within the body of Christ.

And then we are least familiar perhaps with the idea of God assigning different portions of faith to us. So I want to move from what is the most common to us to what is perhaps the least common idea among these three.

And then we will see a common thread though that ties them all together. And that common thread is no more clearly stated than it is with the third form of diversity that we find in the body of Christ.

[13:51] Verse 6, that we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. God Himself determines based upon the grace that He gives to us what gifts you have to serve in the body of Christ.

God decides that. You don't decide that. That's not something that you can just create. There are some gifts that God gives that we can improve upon, that we can sharpen, but you can't just wake up one day and decide I'm going to have this spiritual gift and then begin to pretend as if you actually have that spiritual gift because God is ultimately sovereign over who gets what spiritual gifts.

And He gives a diversity of them within the church. In fact, hold your place there in Romans and turn over to 1 Corinthians 12. We'll turn here a couple of times this morning because what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, both in language and vocabulary and in the general themes that Paul is discussing, there's so much similarity between 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 at this point that it's helpful for us to move back and forth a little bit this morning.

So I want you to look very quickly here at chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians 4 and we're going to see two things here in these verses. We're going to see the diversity, we're going to see the variety in the gifts that God gives, but we're also going to see God's sovereignty in the distribution and determining of who gets those gifts.

So look at verse 4, 1 Corinthians 12. He starts off and he says, now there are varieties of gifts. There's the diversity of gifts. But the same Spirit, the same Spirit, and what is the role of this Spirit that we all have in common?

[15 : 35] Verse 7, to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. So there's unity in that, the Spirit in distributing gifts. He is aiming at the common good of the body, not the exaltation of the individual.

That's not what he's after. He's after the common good of the body of Christ. And then if you move further down to verse 11, he says, all these, all these gifts are empowered by one and the same Spirit.

Here's God's sovereignty here. Who apportions to each one individually as he wills. He ultimately decides what gifts you have to use within the body of Christ.

which is not to say that you can't desire other spiritual gifts because Paul says that it's okay to desire certain spiritual gifts. Which is not to say that it's not okay to pray that God might grant you a particular spiritual gift.

It's okay to pray for God to grant you a spiritual gift. But whether or not he grants you that spiritual gift is his decision to make. And we need to bend and bow before the sovereignty of God and the distribution of gifts.

[16 : 49] Because if we don't, we face two dangers. On the one hand we face the danger of envying others and wanting the gifts that they have. But then on the other hand and one that I think more closely ties in to Paul's point in Romans chapter 12 is we face the danger of thinking that everyone else ought to be able to do the kinds of things that God has gifted us to do.

And that leads to pride. Paul is attacking pride in the hearts of God's people in this chapter. Don't think too highly of yourself.

Think with sober judgment. Know who you are. But one of the ways that we often elevate ourselves in our own thinking is by demoting others around us and thinking well if they just thought the way that I think or they could understand things the way that I understand them or if they could do the things that I could do and we do it in a number of ways.

Sometimes those who are more sort of theologically astute those who are given to study and to arriving more easily at a deeper understanding of the scriptures can be very judgmental at others who are struggling along behind that and trying to catch up and we can be very judgmental at times. Or sometimes those who are gifted with the ability to serve others just an incredible ability to serve others can grow frustrated and agitated with others in the body of Christ who do not seem to serve either as cheerfully and joyfully or as easily as they do.

[18 : 21] And rather than recognizing that their ability to serve with joy and with ease is a gift given by God Himself they make the assumption that it's something that they themselves have generated so why can't this person generate that gift within themselves?

They can't because you can't and you didn't. God sovereignly distributes the gifts as He sees fit and you ought to be grateful for the gifts that God has given you and rather than want others to be like you and have the gifts that you have you ought to celebrate the ways in which they are different and the gifts that they do have.

It's so very easily for us to elevate ourselves in our own minds by elevating our gifts to the position of being normative for everybody and they're just not they're not they're a diversity of gifts I mean

Paul lists seven of them you can go back to Romans chapter 12 Paul lists just seven of them here in Romans chapter 12 he lists some that might fall in the broad category of sort of speaking gifts so that he talks about prophecy he talks about teaching he talks about exhortation but in all of these gifts all of these speaking gifts he urges us to do them in ways that corresponding to the gifting that we have so he says if you prophesy you should prophesy according to the measure of faith that you have he says if you teach you should teach with teaching in other words you should teach in accordance with your ability to teach if you exhort in your exhortation in other words you do these things and you exercise these gifts according to the amount of giftedness that God has granted to you because it should be obvious to us that there are going to be people within the body who do possess the same gift but not necessarily in the same measure there are a whole lot of preachers in the body of Christ there are a lot there are thousands upon thousands of preachers preaching this morning and some of them preach a whole lot better than I do and some of them can barely stammer their way through it but they can preach there are not only varieties of gifts but there are varieties of giftedness within those gifts and Paul is urging us with each of these things use your gift in the way that God has apportioned that gift to you and then there are some gifts that are not speaking gifts there are more gifts that we might say are characterized by the ability to aid others and help others and serve others so if you look there at the text you can see them very clearly he says if you look in verse 7 he speaks of the gift of service he speaks then of the gift of generosity in verse 8 he speaks of the gift of leadership in verse 8 and also the gift of acts of mercy so there's a lot of variety going on here but this is not an exhaustive list it's really not when Peter mentions the spiritual gifts

Peter doesn't even give a list like this he just divides them into the two categories some will have gifts of speaking and some will have gifts of service Peter says and he doesn't even give a list if you go to 1 Corinthians 12 again you'll see a list of gifts that does not correspond very closely at all with the list that we find here there's no exhaustive list of the gifts that God sovereignly distributes among his people in the New Testament even if you cobble them all together so that there may be giftings that you have that you don't have a name for it that's okay there may be things that God calls you to do within the body of Christ that require you to be able to perform certain things that God grants you the ability to do that and you don't know what to call it because there's not a word for it in the New Testament that's okay just serve with the gift that you have into the apportionment of the gift that you've received and don't look down on others because they don't do the same or they don't do it as well as you do it God sovereignly distributes the gifts and then very closely related to his distribution of gifts though is in fact our function within the body of Christ so that he says in verse 4 as in one body we have many members and the members do not all have the same function we just don't all do the same things within the body of Christ which makes perfect sense we can't all be preachers we can't all be worship leaders we can't all be servants we can't all do to the same measure the things that everyone else does we can't

I mean there you will be called at various times to speak the gospel everyone is called to evangelize not everyone has the gift of evangelism you will you are required within the body of Christ to serve to varying degrees but not everybody has what Paul refers to as the gift of service we're all called to be generous and to give but not all of us will have the gift of giving with great generosity and the level of cheerfulness that Paul indicates here so that there are activities that we all perform yes but some some are called specifically to the performance of that as their primary role within the body of Christ and what to prize that and value that we ought not grow frustrated that others don't don't do as much as we do in certain areas of the body that perhaps you think if everybody would come up and do this it would be a lot easier I'm doing a lot on my own here there's a small group that's taking care of this and sometimes that's the reality we do need more hands to pitch in but sometimes it's just that but you've been called and gifted for that and not everybody else has so rejoice that God has called you to do it and don't grow frustrated when others are doing the things that they're called to do and not the things that you are called and gifted to do we have different functions of course [23:58] Paul uses this language again in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 where he extends the metaphor of the body and he talks about the fact that the eye is not an ear the foot is not a hand emphasizing the reality that just as the human body all our parts have different functions so we within the church have different functions and it's so obvious to us when we see that analogy it's so obvious to us that a hand does not function in the same way as a mouth and yet at times we speak and think as if we should all perform the same functions in the church and we should not and we should celebrate that that we do not and then the third thing that we need to consider this morning

the one that I think perhaps might be the most confusing of the three is that Paul says that in order to think with sober judgment we need to each think according to the measure of faith that God has assigned that we need to view ourselves we need to assess ourselves in accordance with the measure of faith that God has assigned to us and that seems strange to us but it ought not to seem strange it ought not to seem strange because there are a number of times throughout the scriptures even in

Paul's letters where Paul speaks of the strength of someone's faith or the weakness of someone's faith you don't even have to go far you probably don't even have to turn a page if you look down in chapter 14 of Romans where Paul in verse 1 says as for the one who is weak in faith so there is a category of those who are weak in faith their faith is not as strong as others in chapter 4 of Romans Paul speaks of Abraham's faith growing strong in the midst of adversity that it didn't weaken it grew strong so we're going to find among us various levels of faith now obviously we all have a measure of faith in the work of Christ upon the cross for us and that faith is the faith that justifies that is the faith by which God unites us to Jesus and counts his righteousness as our righteousness so we share that faith in common but on top of that there are going to be varying degrees of faith within the body of

Christ there will be varying degrees of ability to trust God there will be varying degrees of spiritual maturity within the body of Christ and God is indeed sovereign even over that the New Testament is clear that faith is in fact a gift that comes from God himself but God's sovereignty over these things never implies that there's not room for growth so that just as we can pray for spiritual gifts that we don't possess yet so also we ought to pray and seek after a faith that grows stronger God is sovereign in the determining he apportions a measure of faith to each of us but he also provides means by which that faith can grow he provides us with the word of God through which the spirit of God works to increase and grow our faith hold your place in

Romans I want you to turn over to 2 Thessalonians because I think it's important for you to see this 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 3 we ought always to give thanks to God for you brothers as it's right now listen carefully because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing your faith is growing abundantly and how does how does that happen well Peter tells us that we ought to desire the pure milk of the word so that by it we may grow up to maturity how does faith strengthen how does God sovereignly work within our hearts to grow our faith he does it through the spirit working through the word as we prayerfully give ourselves over to the scriptures so God is sovereign and he has provided means by which through prayer and time in the bible he just might distribute to you another gift or he might put you in another function in the church or he might strengthen your faith and your spiritual maturity and all of those are good things but if we don't begin by recognizing the sovereignty of God in building diversity within the body of Christ in all of these ways gift things functions levels of maturity if we do not recognize his sovereignty then we'll look around sometimes and we will think something is wrong with the church when nothing is wrong in that particular area there's always something wrong with the local church right because we're not yet perfect but it's so easy for us to look and diagnose problems that don't exist because we expect a measure of uniformity without the body of Christ normally measured by ourselves that God does not intend to exist God intends for great diversity to exist under the headship of Jesus in his church so that he might be more greatly glorified as we go about the business of being the body of Christ you cannot effectively honor God and love others if you don't have a right view of yourself and your place within the great diversity of the body of Christ you cannot do it let's pray if you don't voy!

[30:13] voy! voy! voy!