

On the Altar (2): By the Grace Given

(Romans 12:3-8)

I. Introduction

- A. What is the most important tool in a toolbox? I had to think about that recently.
1. Tressa needed to disconnect her car battery (to reset her silly Honda radio).
 - a. I had 15 screw drivers, 4 hammers, 2 electric drills & adjustable jig saw
 - b. I even had tools that could've and should've worked—pliers, sockets, etc.
 - c. What I needed was one specific open-end wrench... the one I had lost
 2. The most important tool in the tool box is the one you need at the moment
 - a. Point of a tool box—have a diversity of tool so that any job can be done
 - b. Point of “toolbox” is to keep tools together (*not scattered all over house*)
- B. So what is the most important gift, talent or ability for the Christian life?
1. The most important one is whichever one you need at the moment, right?
 - a. Are Greek word studies important? Not if it's time to lead worship!
 - b. Is a balanced church checkbook key? Not if we've had a death in family!
 - c. Is clean baptistery, children's worship or organized potluck important?
 - d. Those are all important things... and at time, they are the most important
 2. The church is a toolbox where all tools that God may need are available.
 - a. Max Lucado (*On the Anvil*) see church as a blacksmith shop full of tools
 - 1) Some in toolbox (*useful/ready*); some on trash heap (*broken/discard*)
 - 2) Some are on the anvil, being repaired & retooled (*to be useful again*)
 - b. This reminds us that we are all God's tools—the church is His toolbox
 - c. No tool is unimportant or unnecessary, but each decides how useful it is.
 3. The imagery the Bible uses is more organic than toolbox—body of Christ
- C. Last week we began a study of the last chapters of the book of Romans
1. Paul's illustration is not that we are on the ANVIL but on the ALTAR
 - a. We are must ourselves as living sacrifices to God in obedience/service.
 - b. **Romans 12-16** is Paul fleshing out what it means to live as a sacrifice
 2. He begins with the gifts God gives to make us useful on altar (**Rom 12:3-8**)
 3. We'll look at this text in terms of how we see ourselves in Lord's body

II. The Grace Given: What Grace Tells US

A. **First**, must see ourselves through the lens of grace ([Rom 12:3](#))

1. This is the implication and application of grace—grace points us outward
 - a. We may not admit it, but we tend to “think of ourselves more highly”
 - b. One of the problems at Rome was this pride ([Rom 11:20](#), [12:16](#))
 - 1) The specific tension was both Jewish and Roman superiority
 - 2) Pride is a particular temptation to the wealthy (see [1 Tim 6:17](#))
 - c. But we have our own standards of pride and superiority in church—
 - 1) Doctrinal understandings, ministry involvement, leadership roles, etc
 - 2) Our favorite song, preferred paint color is more important than yours
 - d. Grace teaches that everything is about God—no room for me to be proud
2. So we are to use “*sober judgment*” (lit “*sane*” or “*clear-headed*,” [Mk 5:15](#)).
 - a. The NLT translates this “*be honest in your evaluation of yourselves.*”
 - 1) He doesn’t say “*downplay yourself as having nothing to contribute*”
 - 2) We that if we compare ourselves to others... *not as talented as they!*
 - b. The “*measure*” we use to see ourselves is the faith that God has given.
 - 1) God gives us true worth and value through the gift of His grace.
 - 2) Paul says God also gives us enough faith to see ourselves as He does
3. And if I see myself through God’s eyes, then I can see you that way too
 - a. If my worth comes from His grace, then you are worthy for same reason!
 - b. C.K. Barrett makes this observation (*The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 235)
The man who is humble before God is unlikely to be arrogant before his fellow-creatures

B. **Second**, we must see ourselves and others as part of the body ([Rom 12:4-5](#))

1. This is one of Paul’s favorite illustrations (see [1 Cor 12:12](#) and [Eph 4:16](#))
 - a. We have one body made up of different parts with different functions
 - b. God designed those parts to be very different, but they all are important
2. So church is one body (UNITY) with many different parts (DIVERSITY)
 - a. The fact we are ONE does not mean that we are all the SAME
 - b. The whole point of having “body parts” is that they are not the same
 - c. Church members are as different as your fingers are from gall bladder!

3. But the fact that we are DIFFERENT does mean we are INDEPENDANT
 - a. Most Christians don't struggle with idea of Christ as our head
 - 1) We may struggle with following, but we know He is the head
 - 2) We struggle with idea that we're connected to other body members
 - b. That means that I don't just do things at church that benefit me
 - 1) I might not "get anything out" of Wednesday or Sunday nights.
 - 2) My participation (just being there) may encourage someone else!
- C. **Third**, we must see ourselves as having gift needed by the body (**Rom 12:6-8**)
1. The word "*gifts*" here is a form of "*grace*" (*charis*) that appears throughout.
 - a. God gave Paul a gift (**12:3**), and Paul tells us that we have different gifts.
 - b. The talents and abilities we have are from God, so He gets the glory.
 - 1) Some (Rick Warren) distinguish *natural talents* from *spiritual gifts*.
 - 2) Point really is that it is God who gives them according to his grace.
 2. The gifts that Paul mentions here can be broken down into two categories
 - a. These are **gifts of prophecy** (speaking) and **gifts of service** (*ministry*).
 - b. Those are two types of gifts Peter specifically mentions in **1 Peter 4:11**
 3. Paul lists 7 gifts— only one is repeated from his list in **1 Cor 12:7-11**
 - a. We could spend a time discussing each gift, but that's not Paul's point
 - 1) **Prophecy**: The repeat, tho GNT is generic, "*speak God's message*"
 - 2) **Serving**: The word here (diakonia) is verb form of word "deacon"
 - 3) **Teaching**: God gave some as "*pastors and teachers*" (**Eph 4:11**)
 - 4) **Encouraging**: Encourage as gift? Barnabas— "*Son Encouragement*"
 - 5) **Contributing**: Is it **resources** or **attitude**? Both are gifts from God!
 - 6) **Leadership**: May be more "*gives aid*" (NAS note) than management
 - 7) **Showing Mercy**: Petersen (MES) has "*work with the disadvantaged*"
 - b. Point isn't to describe each gifts; his point is "*USE your gift for church*"
 - c. There are many other ways that God gifts His people to build up others.
 - 1) God gifts some people to write music or lead worship— not listed.
 - 2) God gifts some people to take care of church finances— not listed.\
 - d. Paul point is that we are to USE our gift to build up the body of Christ

4. Go back for a second to the phrase “*spiritual act of worship*” in **Rom 12:1**.
 - a. The word “worship” is *latría*, rendered “ministry” in **Hebrews 9:6**, “...the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry.”
 - b. What was the ministry of the priest? They are to offer sacrifices, right?
 - 1) But they also cleaned up afterward and took care of Tabernacle!
 - 2) **Lev 16:28**– Someone carried off the ashes after Day of Atonement.
 - 3) That was a proscribed part of the ritual and a very important role
 - c. Our “*spiritual act of worship*” is anything we do to serve Lord and body
 - 1) When Hayward hangs off ladder replacing lights, that is worship
 - 2) When Melissa tells the Bible story during WOW, that is worship
 - 3) When Dan mows grass or Byrdie makes breakfast, that’s worship
 - 4) When Jacob takes supplies to Safehaven or food to DUCO– worship
 - d. We are all gifted in some way, and we are all to use our gift for the body
5. This “worship” both serves other people and glorifies God (**1 Pet 4:10-11**)

III. Conclusion

- A. The “80-20 Rule” is an accepted principle on which most churches operate
 1. The principle states that 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people
 - a. For many members, church is a place they go to worship on Sunday
 - b. All the stuff that has to be done to get ready is done by church elves!
 2. But does the “80-20 Rule” have to be true? Can it ever be “100-100 Rule?”
 - a. We must expect ourselves to become involved in an area of service
 - b. What is more, the elders need to expect that each of us will be involved.
 - c. We don’t all have to do everything, but we all should be doing something
 3. **Ministry Fair**: An effort to match up workers with areas of service
- B. Remember the three different views that Paul asks us to take here—
 1. We see ourselves (*and therefore one another*) through the **lens of grace**
 2. We must see ourselves as **part of the body** (*and therefore of one another*)
 3. We must see ourselves as having a **gift** that is needed (*to build up others*)
- C. Where is your place in the body? *Will you be poured out like win on the altar?*