

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Romans 12:1-8
“Fueling Christ’s Work”

October 11, 2015
(20th Sunday After Pentecost)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

ROMANS 12:1-8 "FUELING GOD'S WORK"

Grace Structures A New Life Under Christ, *Paranesis* = Gospel → Life

1) vv.1-2 MAKING A GOOD BEGINNING: SURRENDERED BODY, NEW MIND. Deliberative

We Live In The Tense Overlap/ Interface Of Two Contrary Regimes

a) v.1 Holy And Living And Acceptable to God. 7 Keys To God's Will Together In The Church:

7 Rights v.1a/v.3a, We Work Out As Family What God Has First Worked In

1 I APPEAL to you therefore, brethren (and sisters!), 4 *Technical Cult Terms*, Solemn Shift From 1:1-11:36 To 12:1-15:13
by the compassion (mercies) of **God** Jewish History + Divine Enablement In Christ // 6:12-14, 13:11-14

Right Sacrifice 6:13, Philo *Every Good Man* 75, **1st Key = Surrender (Say Yes!)**
to *present* your bodies (pl.) as a living *sacrifice*,/
holy/ and **acceptable** (well-pleasing) to God/
which is your spiritual (*logicos* = rational) *worship*. (3 Qualifiers) WORSHIP YOU OWE AS RATIONAL BEINGS
Right-thinking, 1 Pt. 2:2, Heb. 13:15, Speech Offering
Life As Doxology, Living Sacrifice = Paradoxical

b) v.2a Negative Command (Passive Voice). //v.1, Battle Is For Your Mind/Heart/ World View

Right Enemy *This World* = Gal.1:4, Present Evil Age = Pull Of Distorted Values

2 Do not be conformed to this world (this age), p.v. = *by the culture* **2nd Key = Resist World's Pressure (Just Say No!)**
Caught Between Two Large Powers: Sin/Evil & God/New Age

b') v.2b Positive Command (Passive Voice). Only The Free In Christ Can Obey This Command

Right Challenge Eph. 4:23, Col. 3:10, Not Anti-Intellectual, SELF AS NEW MIND

but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, p.v. = *by God*, 1:21 **3rd Key = Reshaped (Study! Pray!)**
God-filled Mind: Eph. 4:23, 1 Pt. 1:14, 2:5, Col. 3:10, 2 Cor. 3:18

a') v.2c Acceptable and Perfect And Good (Communal). (3 Qualifiers) //v.1b, Body/Mind Integration

Right Goal Right Worship = Proper Behavior In Church/Society

that you (pl.) may prove (discern) what is the will of **God**, Quest, Transformed Minds May Discern God's Will
what is good/ and **acceptable** and perfect (complete)./
To Be An Offering Of Righteous Living: All Of Life!

The Offer Of The New Self Is The Greatest Sacrifice

Together We *Discern* The Particulars Of God's Will Within Scripture, Enacted In Gifts

2) 12:3-8 FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE MULTI-GIFTED BODY OF CHRIST.

Density Of Mental Language: *Rational, Mind, Think*

a) v.3 Grace and Faith: Proper Self-Evaluation Of God's Gifts To Each And All.

Right Thinking v.3a/v.1a, New Mind → New Community, No Pride About Giftings

3 1 For by the **grace** (*charis*) given to me I BID every one of you *phronein* (4x), Gift Of Apostle, 1:5-6, Teaching
2 not to think of himself (herself) more highly that he (she) ought to think, Also *Not Less Than!*
2' but to think with sensible thinking. **4th Key = Honest Self Evaluation**

1' each according to the measure (trust/responsibility) of **faith** which God has assigned to him (her). Conversion
What Call/Power Tools Has God Entrusted To Me?

b) vv.4-5 The Church As One Differentiated, Organic Body Of Christ. Gifted Unity

Right Community Grace = Source, Gift = Community Impact, Picture + Insight

4 For as in one body we have many members, **5th Key = Individuality (Me) & Community (We)**
Look In The Mirror!

5 and all the members do not have the same function, Unity Is Not Uniformity, Multiform Grace
so we, though many, are one body in Christ Radically Interdependent Reality
and individually members one of another. One Body, Many Gifts: 1 Cor. 12:14-26, 14:26; Eph. 4:11-17, 1 Pt. 4:10

a') vv.6-8 Grace and Faith: Seven Spiritual Gifts/ Functions. All Receive Gifts That Matter

Right Function *Be-grace-ments*, Charismatic Community! 1 Cor. 12:12-13 At Conversion

6 Having gifts (*charis-ma-ta*) that differ according to the **grace** (*charis*) given us, p.v. , Functions, Rainbow
let us use them: 1 Pt. 4:10, "Use them" = Tools **6th Key = Use Your Gifts For The Good Of Others**

Not Offices, Mandate For The Common Good

Word **Deed** **7 Gifts (Totality): Spirit's Power In Us** **Effect Or Fruit: Virtue/Character** 2+5, 4+3 (Words + Deeds)
2 Nouns + 5 Doers //1 Cor. 12:1-11, 28-30, Eph. 4:1-11

7 ✓ ✓ if prophecy (revealed communication), in accordance to our **faith**; 1 Cor. 12:10, 14:1, 5; 1 Thess. 5:19-20

✓ ✓ if service (enabling others), in our serving; Acts 6:2, 1 Pt. 4:10

✓ ✓ he (she) who teaches (truth offered), in his (her) teaching; 1 Cor. 12:28, James 3:1, Heb. 5:12

8 ✓ ✓ he (she) who exhorts (truth applied), in his (her) exhortation; *consoles*, 1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11, 14
Gifts 5-7 = Acts Of Love, Care

✓ he (she) who contributes (generosity) in liberality (wholeheartedly); Eph. 4:28, Acts 2:45; 4:34-37

✓ he (she) who gives aid (presides/leads), with zeal (diligence); 1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Tim. 5:15, 17

✓ he (she) who does acts of mercy (kindness), with cheerfulness (*hilarotes* = hilarity!); 1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Tim. 5:15, 17

Gift (Spirit's Arsenal) Are Not Accessories But Necessities: To Be Living Extensions

FUELING CHRIST’S WORK

*“Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”*

The only way to successfully resist the world’s immense conforming pressures.

R O M A N S 1 2 : 2 a

There is a gift in every person because every person is a gift, and sometimes it emerges in such a spectacular fashion the whole world cheers. So it was in November 2011 with Jason McElwain, an autistic high school student in Rochester, New York. There was no way he could make the cut for Varsity basketball, so the Coach appointed him *team manager*, a job Jason took seriously and for which he won the respect of all. He wore a white shirt and black tie to every game as he sat on the bench and did his job fetching towels and water for players.

In his senior year Coach Johnson surprised everyone when he put Jason in the game with a bit over four minutes on the clock. The crowd cheered as he trotted onto the court. You could sense their disappointment when his first shot missed the rim by six feet. A second also missed. Then he hit a three-pointer, and the place went nuts. But Jason wasn’t done. He kept shooting and hitting, scoring twenty points during his one and only game. He made a school record six three-pointers in that short time. At the buzzer both stands emptied in ecstasy at the great surprise gift that was Jason. Those who were present will retell the story until they die because they were there the moment the gift was unwrapped and put on display. Coach Johnson choked up, “In twenty-five years of coaching,” he said, “I’ve never experienced the emotional high of that game.” The video spread through social media, and in a short time had three million hits; when I checked Friday it had over fifteen.¹

That evening something wonderful was seen on a basketball court. In Jason McElwain was hidden a great gift, the ability for a few brief minutes to dazzle the crowds in a game that imitates life. And isn’t that why we love sports, for those moments when something shines and we all cheer and feel a little more alive for

¹ Edited from Les and Leslie Parrott, *Making Happy: The Art And Science Of A Happy Marriage* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2014), 102. May be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMjmzhF5320.

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having seen it? All the more when an unlikely does the seeming impossible. It touches something deep within, a reminder echoing from a long abandoned Eden of who we are and why we exist and why everyone matters no matter what.

Scripture teaches that every human being, and that means from conception onwards since that is when humanity is first established at the blending of DNA,² is made in the image of God, the *imago dei* if you want to impress people with your Latin. Other of God's critters have better sight or hearing or an uncanny sense of direction for long migrations and may thrive where we cannot go, but in no other species of the animal kingdom is there the constellation of particular powers that are worthy of the phrase *image of God*. Fish are not in God's image and the great apes may be a sort of rough first draft³ left behind on the drawing board, but only to us is given the unique dignity and high call of bearing the image and likeness of our wondrous Creator,⁴ an image which is marred by sin and twisted by evil but is never fully defaced and rendered unrecognizable, except finally perhaps in hell where what remains is not a full person in any sense but only the residue of what may once have been a human. "What goes to hell," said C. S. Lewis, is "not a man, but remains."⁵

Interesting thing about us and the image we bear. The image is dynamic and responsive, meaning it can change in two directions. The image is not just this or that characteristic but the whole of who we are from God's perspective. If we respond to God's overtures and invitations— the name for which is *prevenient grace* from a

² "[The zygote], formed by the union of an oocyte and a sperm, is the beginning of a new human being" (Kenneth L. Moore, *Before We Are Born: Essentials of Embryology* [7th edition, Philadelphia, PA: Saunders, 2008], 2).

³ The *rough draft* image is from John Wesley, as referenced in Charles W. Hargitt, "John Wesley On Evolution," *Science*, Vol. 26, No. 674, (11/29/1907), 757.

⁴ Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." On a recent survey by LifeWay, see the analysis of Cathy Grossman, "Religious or not, many Americans see a creator's hand," www.religionnews.com/2015/10/07. Conversing with people about the Creator who designed the universe and defines human morality is a good place to start a faith conversation since so many— even among the non-religious, and even some atheists— share this deep intuition. It is the abiding evidence of common grace.

⁵ Quoted in Peter Kreeft, *Hell*, www.peterkreeft.com/topics/hell.

gracious God who always make the first move towards his alienated children- then the image moves towards restoration. A few pieces of the shattered mirror are glued back together and the angle of reflection adjusted. A life that was sunk in the earth catches a bit of light from above. And if we respond to present illumination, more comes. Grace received increases our capacity for more of the same. But if we set up a position of resistance, meaning we look everywhere in creation for help and not to the God whose nail-pierced hands reach in our direction, then the image is further damaged and grows less reflective, more fixed in its angle and orientation to life. Our resistance does not hurt God but further distorts us because saying No to God is saying No the very ground of reality, the One on whom life depends, and that cannot be without consequence. A stiff neck and hard heart and a closed mind and a contrary will leads to blind eyes and a clouded intellect and finally a dead end.⁶ Some do not want to be messed with and changed. Permanent unbelief is a choice.

You see- according to the teaching of Scripture and the settled conviction of the church- no one arrives with a shiny new mirror fresh out of the box. The newly born are innocent of transgression because of their weakness, but the damage is already theirs and will soon enough manifest itself for all to see, most particularly their parents. To extend our analogy, we arrive with mirrors already broken and in pieces; all are damaged goods from the start, and none are exempt except One.⁷ One reason Jesus is at the same time so magnetically attractive and so incredibly unnerving is that he alone shows who we were designed to be, an undamaged mirror image of God with perfect reflection along both vectors, the love of God and the love of neighbor without distortion in either direction. He is attractive because he reflects who we were meant to be; he is offensive because in his presence we see how in pieces and misaligned we are. That I need him is a blow to self-sufficiency.

Now scholars and theologians argue over the specifics of what the image includes; some speak of the moral image- our capacity for right action, others of the

⁶ On this downward process of devolution, see Romans 1:18-32.

⁷ Article VII of the U.M. Articles of Religion, “Of Original or Birth Sin” is clear on our desperate status: “Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam- as the Pelagians do vainly talk- but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually” (*BOD 2012*: 65). We really are lost, wandering, and bent towards evil. This is our offensive message.

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political or social image— our capacity to cooperate and build cultures, and some of the capacity for self-reflection and self-transcendence, but at the base one meaning is secure, and that is that we were made to know and reflect the One whose image we bear.⁸ So when I think of the image I think of a hunger for God that shows up in a deep longing and in prayer and the search for meaning and beauty.

Think of a mirror set at a forty-five degrees. If at ninety degrees to the earth, it reflects the world back to itself as when you stand before a full length mirror. If flat at zero degrees like a lake, it reflects the heavens back to the heavens. But at forty-five degrees two vectors operate as the mirror reflects the world upwards to God on the vertical axis and God out to the world on the horizontal axis. It's a two way reflection. We are embedded as male and female bodies in creation, yet with a shared reflective surface, an image that— however broken and distorted— is designed to reflect God into the world and the richness of creation back to God in prayer and praise. And when restored and realigned— which only comes through Jesus Christ and his work for and in us— each person is set right again with new understanding and capacities. And finally, in two stages for most of us— meaning heaven after death as saved souls and then later on a resurrection body at the arrival of God's kingdom— we will be fully restored, there to spend all eternity reflecting God's glory and wisdom into a restored creation and the riches of all the cosmos back to God in praise and joy, ever-more fulfilled by our unending task and our inexhaustible Creator as it gets better and better forever as we live into the depths of the love that is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁹ There we will be finally and fully human, gloriously alive in resurrection bodies with all the residues of sin and evil and death forever gone like some bad dream forgotten. The second century bishop of Lyon— Irenaeus— was right when he said, "The glory of God is man (and woman) fully alive," and this is not a statement of self-fulfillment but fulfillment in and through Jesus Christ.¹⁰

⁸ On the view of John Wesley, see "John Wesley's Doctrine Of Salvation: Part One," <http://cbounds.blogspot.co.uk/2006/07/john-wesleys-doctrine-of-salvation>. Also his Sermon 45, "The New Birth," <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-45-the-new-birth>.

⁹ On the two stage post-mortem existence found in the New Testament and classic creeds, see N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008).

¹⁰ See Patrick Reardon, "The Man Alive: Irenaeus Did Not Teach Self-Fulfillment," www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=25-05-003-e.

If a king in the ancient world wanted to impress the far off subjects of his realm, he had statues of himself made and displayed in the city centers of his far flung kingdom. It wasn't actually the king himself, but it was his image, his icon, a visible likeness and reminder of his rule across the realm. And that is who we are, image bearers, living icons, not of stone or bronze but flesh and blood and mind and heart and male and female. We are spread across creation to develop it according to the wisdom of the One whose image we bear.¹¹ And when we were shattered and no longer worked as designed, One finally came among us to pick up the pieces and put them back together. And his name is Jesus, God's perfect image in flesh, a flawless mirror, and he is still at work because he is not a dead hero to be admired but a living Lord who conquered death and is loosed from the limits of space and time in order to be available to every single person to do what only he can do, which is put life back together according to God's design for us as image bearers.

One of the great artistic achievements of the church is stained glass because of the mystical light it lends, particularly to great cathedrals, as if heaven's beauty danced as the sun marched across the heavens to light up one window, then another. Clear panes are OK for arid rationalists in lecture halls, but the soul want color with light shining through as a statement of God's beauty. And the closer you get to such a window the more clearly you see the artistry of how the pieces of cut glass, some quite irregular, are set in relation to one another to form larger mosaics. I remember at Duncan Church in Georgetown going into the sanctuary late on summer afternoons as the sun set to see the west window set aflame with reds and blues and oranges almost too bright to look at. I'd watch the fire move up the window as the sun set. I'd sit and pray with eyes open, "Lord, light up the broken pieces of my life as you light up this window. Put me back together, and shine, Jesus, shine."

TURNING TO THE TEXT

Surrender And Reformation: Romans 12:1-2.

One of the primary reasons to read and meditate on Scripture is to acquaint yourself with the descriptions of God's great work of salvation, meaning just how is it that God undoes the deep damage and brings us back into right relationship, first with himself, then with ourselves, one another, and the rest of creation? The Apostle Paul

¹¹ For a brief treatment of the image of God in Scripture, see Brian D. Russell, *Invitation* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2014), 2015, 40-43.

has one of these descriptions in the first eight verses of Romans chapter twelve. For eleven chapters he's been carefully reasoning about the systemic disease of sin and its multiple effects, the most severe of which is death as the wage sin finally pays us all. And how in his great mercy God raised up Israel, gave them the law to both guide and frustrate their obedience, and then how Jesus comes to take our penalties upon himself in a great act of self-offering love. His is the final sacrifice; no more animals need die in the temple because the symbol of repeated animal sacrifices has now given way to the single self-sacrifice of God the Son for his people. Our forgiveness is secured, the price paid in full by another, and we are offered peace with God. Long lost prodigals we are welcomed home again. Alienation is overcome. The curtain of the temple is torn from top to bottom by God and all are welcomed into the divine presence symbolized for Israel in the holy of holies. The heart of God is laid bare and open to the world in the crucified– and now risen– flesh of Jesus.

One of the great benefits of the new relationship is that when we deposit our trust in God's Son because he alone is worth it, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within each new believer as a living link and an inward assurance that we are indeed beloved and accepted. The circle of love that is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit now passes through us, and each is given an internal witness to aid in prayer, in moral discernment, in receiving from Scripture, in the growth of the virtues we call *the fruits of the Holy Spirit*,¹² and in the experience of the ongoing ministry of Jesus in spiritual gifts, which one of our United Methodist friends defines as “special divine abilities given to every Christian, by the grace of God, through the Holy Spirit, to be used to serve and strengthen one another, and to glorify God.”¹³ We are indwelt by the Spirit to become more and more like Jesus in character and to experience the power of his love flowing through us for the benefit of others. The virtues grow more slowly, much like fruit, but the gifts of the Spirit may pass through us in a moment, much like the delivery of a letter. A prophecy, a healing, an insight. So bit by bit the reflective surface of the mirror is restored by the master craftsman and we are set at the right angle for maximum reflection on both axes. This is what God is doing, but it helps if we understand the process and welcome it with all the trust we have.

So, having laid out the great work that God does *for us*, Paul then– beginning

¹² Galatians 5:22-23.

¹³ Carol Cartmill & Yvonne Gentile, *Serving from the Heart: Finding Your Gifts and Talents for Service* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2011), 31.

in chapter twelve— explores the work that God does *in us* and *through us*. Having received the mercies of God as it came to a climax in Jesus, what is our response to be? It is this: that we gladly take ourselves, our body and all its capacities, and offer the whole self to God in surrender. God does not want this or that from us as a substitute; *God wants us!* Unconditional surrender, a waving white flag. And the four terms Paul’s uses for this transaction: *to present, sacrifice, holy, and worship* are all technical terms from the ancient sacrificial system but now with new meanings. God is not after your lamb or your cow or your first born or so much of your wheat; God is after you, that you trust him enough to surrender because it’s the only way he can restore you. Your assent is required. And it is befitting rational creatures that we willing cooperate with the One who has more good for us than we would dream for ourselves. It is our highest fulfillment; it is life as worship to say Yes to this God. Our bodies which carry the creation distinctives of gender and sexuality are now to be fully expressed only as God intends. The whole self and all its relations includes our physical capacities and limits; it includes whatever wealth or worth we’ve accumulated; it includes our web of family relationships and friends, education and accomplishments, our race and genetic history, loyalties and preferences, hopes and dreams, successes and failures. All that we are and are not is now a living sacrifice, a whole-life response to what God offers in Jesus Christ with nothing held back.

It pleases God when we surrender the keys and say, “You drive.” Some drive by Jesus and wave politely on their way to another destination. Some stop and put him in the trunk like a spare tire for emergencies only. Others invite him to sit in the back seat as an honored passenger. Fewer invite him to sit beside them as a conversation partner, even a friend. But what he wants is the keys and the driver’s seat, and until you surrender both, you really don’t trust him with where life goes next. When I asked one struggling soul where Jesus was in his car, he smiled, “He’s the hood ornament! He lets other drivers know what brand I prefer.” We both had a good laugh. But with a car as an image, we all know where he is, don’t we? Deep transformation is only available to those who surrender both keys and control.¹⁴ How hard this is because here a self-run life ends. I don’t want to live on my own any longer; I want him to live through me.

It’s very interesting what Paul speaks of next out of his own experience. Surrender immediately sets us at odds with the world around us and opens us to

¹⁴ The extended car analogy is taken from Norma Dearing, *The Healing Touch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, n.d.), 31-33.

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seeing life through a new set of lens as our mind receives infusions of divine light and understanding. We've crossed an invisible boundary into a new world that was there all the time but unseen. We stop letting the world squeeze us into it's mold; passive conformity is out, and we push back hard. The fads and fashions of the culture mean less and less; we see beneath the teeming surface down to the deep issues of spiritual warfare. We live behind enemy lines as subversive agents of the kingdom of God. This is what verse 2 implies, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

To surrender the whole of you to as much of Jesus as you currently understand is to be ushered in a new realm. You are in the same place, but life is now different. Pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell spoke of the spiritual tipping point this way, "There are two great moments in a person's life: the moment you were born and the moment you realize why you were born."¹⁵ You are where you are for a reason, and if you give Jesus the keys and trade seats, he will show you how well placed you are in his battle strategy and let you to see behind the scenes to the spiritual battle that wages all around us. If you receive a glimpse of how he sees this world and what he's doing to reclaim it, you'll never be the same. It beats any spy or adventure movie ever produced. You are now on divine assignment.

So why surrender to Jesus? Because he's the only one worth surrendering to! And why resist the pressures of a fallen culture in which you've so long lived? Because they destroy people, first by making them trivial, then by sucking out their souls like some great leech. And why risk having God rewire your thinking? So you can see and participate in the hidden operations of the alternative kingdom. And why does that matter? Because the highest honor and privilege in life is— as Paul states in verse 2— to “prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Isn't that what we've prayed for? “Thy will be done, on earth during and in my little life, as it now is in heaven.” Unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ opens us to God's fight with the world and gives us access to a new thinking process so we can sense and see what God's wants us to be and do, not in some ideal tomorrow but each and every day right where we are. What might God want to do with a band of surrendered people who understanding the conflict, who have a new outlook, who seek and follow God's will together? It wouldn't take many of those to leave a mark, and it starts with surrender, with each day a *living sacrifice*, with a fresh No to the world's false agenda and a big Yes to God's true agenda.

¹⁵ PreachingToday.com search under Romans 12:1-8.

A New Synergy: Romans 12:3-8.

The theme of a *renewed mind* is continued in the second paragraph in verse 3 where Paul warns those who hear his letter read in one the house churches about a possible stumbling point. For anyone in that highly-stratified world, and particularly for those who were slaves or the urban poor, it was a great move up to learn that God the great Creator cared about them, not just the Emperor, that Christ has come for them and that they were invited to be his commissioned agents wherever they were. To find that the Holy Spirit had taken up residence within was almost too much to conceive. God living inside of me? God working to make me like his Son? God using spiritual gifts to bless others through me? And so— if you weren’t careful— these new privileges might puff you up when compared with your former status. The trick, said Paul, is not to think more highly of yourself than you ought, or yourself as any less than another, but to hit the sweet spot of an accurate self-understanding. Value what calling and gifts God gives you. Find ways to honor the call and capacities God gives others so you work together with the same coordination as a healthy body.

Do you see the layered case Paul is building for how the church is to function? Surrendered people, each day a living sacrifice. No to the false pressures of the world; Yes to a new way of thinking. A firm commitment to seeking and doing God’s will together. An appreciation of the gifts God bestowed on me and others for the sake of strength and unity. And then a charge for all in verse 6, “Having spiritual gifts that differ according to the grace given us, *let us use them....*” The Spirit’s mighty array of powers are not for admiration; they are to do kingdom work, to extend the ministry of the risen Jesus through each and every follower.

When the light of God’s grace strikes the prism of the church, it refracts into a rainbow of colors, and in this analogy each of the Spirit’s gifts is a color. Many colors, one rainbow; many gifts, one unified body of Christ. In this way of understanding the identity of the church, everyone matters; no one is redundant. So what do I do when people ask, “Pastor, where should I serve?” Well, I ask something like, “What are your spiritual gifts and passions? What is your dream, and what keeps you up at night? Where is your heart broken? What do you hear when you ask God about the mission of your life?” They most often return a blank stare because no one ever told them about this stuff or asked such probing questions. Their model is the church as a club or minor bureaucracy with all sorts of slots to fit people into. We need volunteer work done, but more than that we need people who are motivated and gifted by God. Sometimes we can find a slot for people, but that is to short-

circuit the real issue of what God wired them to do and what their assignment is in the body of Christ. Where does their deep passion intersect with the deep pain in the world? What dream lies hidden within them that would startle others if released in full force? But that takes time and prayer and study and group confirmation and a spirit of experimentation, and we seem to have little time to do that work together. Discernment takes time. There is no quick path to destiny.

Spiritual gift inventories may help,¹⁶ but this is more about surrender than checking boxes and tallying the outcome. It's more about reviewing where God has used you in the past, what intrigues you, where others affirm you. And at some point it's no longer about this or that speciality; it's about trusting that the Holy Spirit in whom all the gifts are resident is able to give what I need in the moment to be part of whatever God wants to do, and sometimes it's just little-ole-me. The gifts I use most often are teaching and tongues and service, and occasionally words of knowledge and wisdom. My job requires I exhort and encourage and show mercy to people all the time. Lori and I give beyond the tithe and contribute lots of service. I often preside and lead, and occasionally I speak a truth that startles both me and the other person, so maybe I occasionally prophesy unawares, especially if the person comes back with a report the insight changed their life and drew them closer to Christ. In gifted areas, the work is easier, but outside my portfolio I still have to get work done. The danger of church staff, including even hard working pastors, is that we conspire together to do the work for you to justify our jobs and to let you off the hook. You come and sit and pray and observe us steal your ministries by claiming they are better done by professionals.¹⁷ What a big, fat lie! What a clever way for the devil to paralyze and render useless much of the body of Christ. That we do it to each other by mutual consent is not good, but it seems to be the way things are for the moment. It would be messy to recover every-member ministry. Corporate church is much neater.

What would it mean if the seven gifts Paul lists here– and if you include the other lists in the New Testament the total is about twenty– were all active in our midst? What if we had prophetic people who spoke specific words of encouragement and insight, not as new revelation but as a local application of the revelation already found in Scripture and the classic faith of the church. My life has been changed by

¹⁶ Cartmill & Gentile, *Serving from the Heart*, 23-29.

¹⁷ The best treatment of this issue remains Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning The Ministry To The People Of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

such insightful and corrective speech. It's like getting a text or email from God! I preach and teach the broad content of the faith as my office requires, but prophetic people are like laser beams. And what if the ability not only to serve but to lead others in service was highly valued? Or how about spiritually gifted teachers who impart the truth through careful preparation? What if the teachers met to pray and help one another? Or the exhorters, who are they? People gifted to help us understand the practical application of teaching, how it works out in daily living. Exhorters want to know what you're doing with what you learned. Then there are those who find real joy in giving generously, even lavishly, and some of them have skills in making lots of money so they can give it away as God leads. And blessed is the church that honors those who serve by leading, by lending expertise and savvy to our operations because with them things run much smoother. And then there are the mercy-showers who— when present with the hurting and ill— bring the kindness and gentleness of God to bear. That they do it cheerfully is an added gift. The flip side to this emphasis on the gifted body of Christ is that at some point we decide not to do the things for which we don't have called and gifted leaders.

CONCLUSION

I close with a homey story from Pastor Brian Wilkerson:

“We have a sterling silver tea set a family member gave us as a reminder of her love. It's old, beautifully made, and sits on a stand in our dining room. Only one problem: we can't use it. She had it chemically coated so it wouldn't tarnish. Hot water will ruin the finish.

God's not looking for sterling silver tea sets but rough-and-tumble clay pots— the kind that can be used everyday in a crash-bang world, carrying within them the life of Christ. The church is not a china cabinet, where precious pieces are stowed out of harm's way. The church is a working kitchen, where well-worn pots are filled again and again to dispense their life-giving contents to a hungry world.”¹⁸

Surrender the whole of who you are to the living Jesus Christ today. Then let me know what's going on. My job is to coach you in the process of transformation. How do I know that? Because its precisely what Paul did in the passage before us.

¹⁸ PreachingToday.com search under Romans 12:1-8.
