

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, October 7, 2012**

**BEING THE BODY, PART 2:
YOUR PLACE IN THE BODY**

Romans 12:3-8

PREVIOUSLY

I'm a big fan of the TV show "NCIS." I'm almost as big a fan of "NCIS" as Alex Osborne is of the Hokies of Virginia Tech. Almost. Not "NCIS: Los Angeles." Sorry, I just prefer the original. The initials NCIS, for any of you who don't know, stand for *Naval Criminal Investigative Services*. Whether or to what degree the TV show depicts the real NCIS accurately is a secondary issue for me. I just like the show.

On occasion, an "NCIS" episode will end with some kind of catastrophe, leaving viewers in suspense until the following week (or until the start of a new TV season), to find out what actually took place and its impact on the NCIS team. On such occasions, the next episode typically begins with the words "Previously on NCIS," followed by scenes from the previous show leading up to the cliff-hanger ending. It is a technique common to many television shows.

It does not have the same kind of dramatic effect, I know, but sometimes I want to say, "Previously at Faith," or "Previously in our study of God's Word," in order to remind you of things God has previously shown us in His Word that are related to our thinking together about God's Word today. So, this morning I want to begin by reminding you of what we gleaned last Sunday from 1 Corinthians 12 and the apostle Paul's use of the analogy of the human body to describe the church and how it is meant to function as the body of Christ. I hope you took away at least these points from the message last Sunday:

1. The church is like the human body, which has many parts, but still remains one body. That is how it is with the church as the body of Christ: One body with many parts.
2. Like the human body with all its internal organs and sensory organs, its flesh and bones and fingers and toes and arteries and all the rest, so it is with the church as the body of Christ. Every part of the body serves a purpose. Every part of the body has a role to play, a job to do, a contribution to make to the wellness and the healthy functioning of the body. *Every* part of the body – including you, if you know Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life. Every member of the body of Christ, whether young or old, strong or weak, has a place and a purpose in the life of the church.
3. To enable us to fulfill His purpose for our lives, God gives to each of us – to every Christian – some spiritual gift(s), some manifestation of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7), some grace gift(s) to use in His service. No true follower of Christ, no member of the body of Christ, is left out. No one. Now, it is true that God does not give the same gifts to everyone. It should not come as a surprise nor cause us any distress that God has given certain gifts to others that he has not given you or me.

God gives the particular gifts He chooses to whom He chooses. Our gifts may differ, but no true Christian is left out. No true follower of Christ is excluded. Not a single one. Each of us who has received the gift of salvation from our sin and guilt by grace through faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, has also received some spiritual gift(s) to be used, as Paul says, “for the common good.” We are to use these grace-gifts from the Holy Spirit for the benefit and blessing of others, to build up the health and strength of the church as the body of Christ, and to bring glory and praise to God.

4. It is crucial that we really grasp this biblical teaching about the church as the body of Christ and the spiritual gifts God gives, and take it to heart because, as Ray Stedman said: “It takes the whole church to do the work of the church.” *The whole church. All of us. Together.* And also this from Stedman: “It is vitally essential that you” – each of you individually and personally – “discover the (spiritual) gift or gifts you possess, for the value of your life as a Christian will be determined by the degree to which you use (what) God has provided you.” Not the value of your life as judged by the world, in accord with its values and beliefs, but the value of your life, the value of your service and witness as a follower of Christ and a member of His church, set apart by God’s sovereign grace to serve His purposes in this generation. You cannot serve God’s purposes in the church or the world, unless you use the particular gift(s) God has given you. For Him.

A WORD OF WARNING

This is all review, with a little elaboration and amplification thrown in. When we turn to Romans 12, we find Paul returning to this same word-picture, this same metaphor of the church as a body with many parts. I want you to notice, though, that he sounds a word of warning in verse 3 before delving once more into the metaphor of church as body. He says: “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.”

Why in the world would Paul say something like that? Why would the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to give this warning? The answer is intuitively obvious to the most casual observer, isn’t it? It is because we are prone to do just that. It is because we have this natural, inborn inclination in our fallen human nature to have an inflated view of ourselves, an exaggerated sense of how important we are. Paul warns us against it precisely because we are prone to think we are better than we really are in an infinite number of ways. We have this tendency to view ourselves, our gifts, our abilities, our expertise, our insight and wisdom, as superior to others – even indispensable. Cemeteries, you know, are filled with people who thought they were indispensable.

Paul does not mention it here, but there is an equal and opposite danger. We are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. Nor are we to think less of ourselves than we ought to think. We are not to think ourselves (or anyone else) to be useless, or without worth or value in the sight of God. No doubt you have heard it said that God don’t make no junk. It is true! God *does not* make junk. Every human being is created in the image of God

and is valuable in God's sight. And every member of the church, every part of the body of Christ, matters. Every part matters to God. And to all the other parts.

A "sober" estimate of ourselves is what Paul advises. What does that mean? It means to see ourselves as God sees us. How does God see us? He sees us as sin-stained, fallen creatures who cannot fix what is wrong with ourselves. He sees us as sinners for whom Christ died. He sees us as objects of His amazing grace and redeeming love. He sees us as His own beloved, adopted children and members of His family. He sees us as temples of the Holy Spirit. He sees us as valued and valuable parts of His body, the church. He sees us as instruments of His grace, love, and mercy in a world in desperate need.

A PLACE AND A PURPOSE IN THE BODY

Here is the paradox of the biblical teaching on the church as a body: No one person is indispensable (except Jesus, of course), but every member of the body is needed. Every member of the body has a place and a purpose. And a gift to be used. As he has already indicated in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul points out again here in Romans 12: The picture of the church as a body emphasizes the essential unity of the church. In the unity of the body there is great diversity, as the body has many parts, and its many parts are not all the same. As it is in the human body, so it is in the body of Christ. To the different members of His body, God sovereignly gives a variety of spiritual gifts.

In the church, then, there is *unity* in one body. There is *diversity* in the different parts or members of the body. There is *variety* in the abundance of gifts God gives to be used in His service. Paul says so in verse 6: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." Your gifts and my gifts are not the same. There is *variety* in the distribution of God's gifts to the members of His body. There is also *mutuality*, which is the principle that in the church, we all belong to each other. We all need each other. We are all meant to care for and about each other. We are not meant to be lone rangers. We are all related and connected to one another through the bonds of faith, hope, and love. And, if we are to fulfill God's purposes both for His church and for our own lives, we must all find our place in the body and use the gift(s) we have been given in service to our Savior.

GIFTS TO BE USED

In verses 6-8 Paul gives a sampling of the kind of gifts God gives to His people. Unlike Webster's Dictionary, it is not a complete, unabridged list. Not comprehensive but representative. If you compare it with the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, you will notice that the two lists are not the same. The same is true with the gifts Paul identifies in Ephesians 4. Each list of gifts is different. None of the lists is complete by itself. In fact, if you put all the lists together, you still probably don't have a full listing of all the kinds of spiritual gifts God gives to His people, because of the boundless nature of His grace.

Though they are different from one another, the list of all agree that the *source* of the gifts is God and His grace; the *purpose* of the gifts is to build up the body of Christ and to bring glory

and praise to the Head – that is, Christ; and there is marvelous *variety* in the gifts God gives (see John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*).

In our passage today, Paul identifies seven gifts. The gift of *prophecy* in this context is best understood, I think, as the God-given ability to explain the meaning of God’s Word and to apply its message to life in an understandable way. We might think of it as the gift of *preaching*. Next Paul mentions the gift of *servicing*. It is the gift of “deaconing” (from the word *diakoneo*), which involves helping others with a cheerful spirit in a multitude of circumstances and needs.

Next on the list is the gift of *teaching*, followed by the gift of *encouragement* or *exhortation*. Barnabas in the Book of Acts was a living illustration of this gift. His real name was Joseph. But nobody called him Joe or Joseph (except possibly his mother). Everybody called him Barnabas, which means “son of encouragement.” They gave him this nickname because he embodied encouragement. In one way or another, he was always encouraging someone.

Next is the gift of *giving* or *contributing generously* to the needs of others. All of us are to give of ourselves and our money as part of our worship and discipleship. But some people have a special gift, a special knack for quietly but joyfully and generously, maybe even sacrificially, responding to needs here, there, and everywhere. Then there is the gift of *leadership*. The word Paul uses comes from a root that means “to stand before (others).” Those who receive the gift of leadership are called to stand before others and lead the way. Last on this list is the gift of *mercy*, which involves a heart of compassion and a willingness to minister to those who are weak or sick or needy in any way. It is not about whether a person deserves compassion or lovingkindness. It is about caring for the people in need regardless – the way God cares for and about us.

The point Paul emphasizes – and the thing that is so critical for us to “get” – is to use the gift you have been given, whatever it is. Whatever your gift, use it. Whether it is preaching or teaching, serving or encouraging, giving or leading, showing mercy or something else from God – whatever it is, use it. Use it for the health and wellness, the strength and vitality of the church. Use it for the benefit of others. Use it to bless people and to increase the influence of the gospel in the world.

Peter and Paul are in full agreement on this. Listen to what Peter says in 1 Peter 4:10-11: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in the various forms. If you speak, do it as one speaking the very words of God. If you serve, do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

Whatever your gift, whether it involves speaking or serving or both, use it to serve God’s purposes in the church and the world.

Your mission is to find your place and your purpose, if you don’t know it, in the body of Christ here at Faith. There are several things you can do to find your place in the body. We’ll

talk about it next Sunday. One thing you can do – one thing I plead with you to do, if you have not yet found your place in the body – is to attend the Pot Providence luncheon next Sunday to learn about specific ministries and opportunities to serve in the body here at Faith, and even to sign up to serve in some ministry where God can use you and your gifts.

Someday God will ask you: “What did you do with what I gave you?” Friends, let’s commit ourselves to use what He has given us in His service and to the glory of His name. Lord, let it be so. Amen.