

Romans 12:3-8 - Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought

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[0 : 00] Our reading is from Romans chapter 12, verses 3 to 8.!

Think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith.

If it is serving, then serve. If it is teaching, then teach. If it is to encourage, then give encouragement. If it is giving, then give generously.

If it is to lead, do it diligently. If it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. May God help us.

[1 : 31] Thanks so much, Lucia. Let's ask the Lord for his help. Thanks, Lucia. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we do ask for your help.

and we ask knowing that you're a generous God who loves to give good gifts to his children and that your eagerness to speak to us now is even greater than our eagerness to listen so so we pray that you might give us ears to hear that we might listen carefully to your word and that you might speak to us ultimately because we want to live lives to your praise and glory as we ask in Jesus name amen amen now there is only one central instruction in our passage this morning so if like me you're one of those people who wants just one simple idea to take away with you then you're in for good news this morning because there is just one instruction it's there in verse three look down at verse three if you've got a bible with you do not think of yourself more highly than you ought that's it that is the take home for this morning everything else in the passage flows from that so this idea of a church where everyone's using their gifts where everyone feels valued where everyone has a part to play that is a function of a group of people a church where people don't think of themselves more highly than they ought literally the greek word there is a combination of the word hype and the word mind paul effectively says you know don't believe the hype about yourself don't believe it and then he adds the positive to the negative and say not only don't believe the hype instead verse three again think of yourself with sober judgment sober judgment then is a combination also of the word for mind but the word for wisdom and mind so don't be hype minded about yourself don't believe the hype instead be wise minded about yourself in other words think sensible true accurate thoughts about yourself have a correct evaluation of your position and your role not a hyped up one and not a dismissive one perhaps we can put it this way just as we start off the the well-being of our church together depends firstly not on what we do but on how we think we say that again the well-being of our church depends not firstly on what we do but on how we think our minds in fact in that sentence the emphasis is so clear that it is almost awkward the word for think or mind appears in some form or another four times in one sentence the niv translation which you've got there in front of you drops one of the things just to make it more readable in the english now of course that makes total sense if you were with us last week and you saw what we're looking at in verses one and two where paul tells us that the the body does what the mind thinks the christian discipleship and transformation starts with the mind before it changes the will or the desires or the emotions because in the bible the access point to your heart and to your desires is your mind we hear the good news of the lord jesus christ we listen to the gospel and we learn it and we think on it and we engage with it and that is a deeply spiritual activity for the christian and it's why wise thinking about yourself not hyping yourself up is so important not just for you personally but also for your usefulness in the church i don't know whether you've ever thought about it like this way before but maybe you're a church

member here and perhaps you serve in lots of different ways perhaps you give really generously to the life of the church perhaps you're on loads and loads of different rotas well all that's brilliant right but the truth remains that your most important contribution to the life of the church here if you're a member of the church are not your skills but your commitment to grow as a christian it's your attitude it's your heart how you're thinking about yourself to think rightly about yourself in the light of the gospel is the most important thing you do for all of us that's the take home right no hype just wise thoughts about ourselves you can write that down you can remember it that is the summary and everything else is kind of flowing from that and what i want to show you is two things that wise thinking thinks two things from the passage that wise thinking about ourselves think what are two characteristics of having a sober judgment of yourself the first one is this wise thinking about ourselves realizes that fundamentally we are all exactly the same we're all exactly the same this might not be immediately obvious as you look around the room this morning we are different ages we're from different backgrounds we have different stories we're from different cultural backgrounds all of which is brilliant right that's great i love that about our church but wise thinking about ourselves sees that for all of those differences amongst us in a very important sense we are all exactly the same they can look at verses four and five for just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function so in christ we though many form one body and each member belongs to all the others this is paul's really simple illustration of what a church is he repeats it often in the new testament his picture of a church is a body he says and bodies are made up of all sorts of different parts or what he calls members and although each of the members performs a different function your hands don't do the same thing as your feet or your eyes or your ears still they are all part of the same body he says they're contributing to the same thing so in the church he says verse five we are in christ and we are together in him we belong to him and we belong to one another one body many members now this means that a church like ours is not seeking to build unity it's not that we are aiming at unity like it's a target that we're trying to achieve no unity in the church is something that we must maintain because it is given to us by the lord jesus so we need to cherish it and not undermine it as we come to christ and belong to him we belong to one another we are united in him now hopefully you see how that brings wise thoughts about ourselves you shouldn't be sitting here this morning thinking do you know what i am more important than anyone else in the room you shouldn't be thinking that nor should you be thinking this morning i'm less important than anyone else in the room because in a very important sense there is no hierarchy like that in a church because every christian who is here is here on the same basis you know it's not that some christians were kind of better people and they needed just a little bit of saving and some people were really terrible people who needed a lot of saving that's not true at all all has been saying in romans all have sinned all have fallen short of the glory of god and the only way of salvation for any person is through faith in the son of god who gave his life on a cross in our place for anyone in this room to be saved took the death of god the son in human flesh of course that doesn't make all of us identical to one another and we'll see more of that in a moment but the point is that just because someone is able perhaps through their circumstances or the gifts that god has given them to take a more prominent role in the gatherings of the church that does not make them a more important member because membership of the church is through union with the lord jesus christ and not through your gifts now just let me tease out a couple of things about that notice here that there is such a thing as membership of a local church membership of the church paul doesn't think does he that church is a place that you attend we say that i attend that church but paul says no church is somewhere that you belong and notice that you don't belong to church simply through the means of attending church and you don't belong to church simply through the means of serving church or not even serving lots or attending lots no you belong to church through he says jesus christ having faith in him maybe you're not a christian this morning and you're just trying to work out this whole church thing and that's great it's really good that you're here this morning you are here as our guest and you are very very welcome and we love having you but let me try and be clear on this not to be unkind in any way but just so that you're really clear it is not possible for you to be part of the church if you're not a christian simply just by coming along right church is not some way that you can belong to just by attending it because belonging to church is really coming individually to trust in jesus christ and by being united by faith to jesus he joins you to the body of the church so everybody in this room who is a member of the church have come to exactly the same point in their life where they have realized that they are unable to save themselves

that their sin and their wickedness and their rebellion put them out of relationship with the god who made them that they deserve his judgment and that their only hope for salvation is trusting in the savior jesus who lived died and rose again in our place that we might be forgiven now if you want to know more about that because you really want to belong to church not just attend church then please come and speak to me or even better sign up for christianity explored that starts in a couple of weeks because we would love everybody who is just attending church as a guest this morning we'd love you not just to attend we'd love you to belong through faith in jesus christ that in our church we try and reflect this belonging by a system of church membership it's not a perfect system because it's run by very imperfect people of whom i'm one and the other leaders of the others but we find that having a list of people who say that they belong to this church through faith in jesus christ helps us to care for one another so perhaps you're a christian this morning and you attend this church but you're not yet formally a member of it well let me encourage you to join as a church member because just like you can't pretend to belong to church by simply attending it if you're a christian you can't really pretend not to belong to church either because through faith in jesus christ he has brought you into membership of the universal church and that's meant to be expressed through your belonging to a local church that's the first thing we belong to church we don't just attend it the second thing to notice from this body illustration is that it gives dignity to everybody here you know it might be this morning that you don't have the gifts that would take you up the front in the church gatherings or it might be that your health or your circumstances mean that you can't attend church as much as you would like to do it might mean that you can't do all the things that you once used to do it might be that you've not been here for very long and so you feel like you're on the fringes of church life that you're not quite a part of things yet you're a bit of outsider well let me tell you if that's how you feel that's not true because we are part of the body through faith in jesus christ and so our membership here is not a function of our usefulness it's not even a function of how long we've been here it is a function of our union with jesus christ through faith in him and that brings real dignity to all of us doesn't it it means that if you're here this morning and you go i don't know what difference i could make to this group of people or or maybe you're actually watching online this morning because you for all your desires couldn't actually get out the house this morning well please if that's you don't think that you don't matter this morning you do matter because you belong to christ and therefore you belong to the church and the church belongs to you just like it does for everyone you know no one should say oh that's my church or that's their church please don't ever say oh i go to west kilburn baptist church that's steve palferman's church please don't ever say that right this church belongs to jesus christ he bought it with his blood and he brought all the members in through faith in him perhaps it's helpful just to put it like this the the main work in church life is not my work and it's not your work right the main work in church is the work that christ has already done local churches don't exist to do jobs for god that god would like to have done but he simply hasn't got the time right that's not true churches exist because god has done all the work required to build them let me just give you a bit of theology for a moment okay this is this is really important in a way this is how the new testament church is very different to old testament israel it's really important when you read your bible that you understand that that you don't just draw a straight line from old testament israel into what you think we should be necessarily doing today in the old testament there was a king who ruled and a priest who atoned for sin and a prophet who spoke god's word and they all worked for god pulling his people together in a nation called israel but in the new testament all those roles found their final fulfillment in jesus christ jesus christ is god's ultimate king ruling over his people jesus is the final priest atoning for sin through the sacrifice of his own body on the cross and he is the great prophet not simply just speaking god's word but being the word of god in human flesh revealing god to us so that we might know who he is and so now in the new testament we do not belong to a nation that's run by a king a priest and a prophet we belong to the church where the king priest and prophet is jesus christ and all the big roles are fulfilled by him he is the king not me not you he is our priest he is the one who makes atonement for us he is the one who forgives our sin i don't do that i can't do that for you you can't do that for yourself he is the word of god to us showing us what god is like revealing him to us we don't do that we only point away from ourselves and point to jesus now now that means doesn't it if in years to come you find yourself in a church run by people who think themselves to be the priests who say to you oh i can get you into god's presence either through my work at an altar or through the cards on my guitar or where the the leaders think that they are kings where their word is to be taken to be the word of god himself can i

suggest to you

[17 : 52] that you run run fast in the other direction because what you found is not a church you found something very different because in church jesus has done the work he is our king our priest and our prophet and churches point away from themselves and they point to him because we're all exactly the same right we're all here on exactly the same basis that's the first thing second thing wise judgment of ourselves sober judgment involves knowing that we are all very different and yes those two points do contradict each other don't they but now let's have a look at this this is really a bit more complex and it's certainly more counter-cultural fourth point is that sober judgment of myself doesn't just see that my standing in christ is the same as everybody else but it also sees that i and you and others have different gifts to one another and therefore different roles and responsibilities in the church take a look at verse three let's see how this starts notice this for by the grace given me says paul i say to every one of you notice that little phrase the grace given look down at verse six it's repeated there he says we have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us this is paul's point grace given in this context is not salvation right paul is not saying i have been given grace to be more saved than you or to be saved in a different way to you are no he's not saying that he couldn't be saying that that would contradict everything else he has said to this point no his point is that god's grace has given him a particular gift and what is his particular gift well paul's gift by the grace given to him he is given the gift which enables him to take a roll up in church which means he can instruct everybody notice that by the grace given to me i say to every one of you this is what you should do and paul is able by the grace gift that is given to him to write down that instruction put it in the bible in the scriptures alongside all of the old testament as well and pass it down through church history that you and i might listen to his grace gift by him telling us what to do as well all's grace gift is that he is an apostle romans 1 verse 1 paul a servant of christ jesus called to be an apostle paul is one of the founding fathers of the church he is laying the groundwork on which everybody else builds he met the risen christ on the road to damascus he was sent by him personally to the gentiles and given authority to write the scriptures now i i hope you understand at that point you and me have not been given that grace we are not apostles like paul we are not given the grace to write the scriptures we have no authority to tell christians all over the world and all through history exactly what they should do paul has that authority i don't you don't and that's not because we're less loved or less saved or less members of the church it's just because god and his wisdom chose paul to do that job and not you or not me and actually you and i should be really thankful of that because being the apostle to the gentiles came along with a thorn in the flesh shipwrecks imprisonments floggings and a whole load of other suffering right and notice how wise thinking sees this gift and this role dynamic look again at verse three 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 faith god has distributed to each of you now notice this is how we're to think of ourselves in accordance with the faith god has distributed to each of you if you have a more literal translation it says something like each of you with the measure of faith god has given now zone in on this right paul here don't think he's talking about saving faith he's not saying that we each have a measure of saving faith you know a pint for you a pint for me a pint for everyone rather he's talking about our role in the community of faith the measure of faith is a is an equivalent to the grace of god given which means that our judgment of ourselves our sober mind relates to seeing the limits on our role in the community of faith that god has given us that god has not only made us to belong to his people but also given us a a role or a gift to exercise amongst his people so although we're all saved the same way we're not all the same people we all have different gifts and those gifts give us a a different responsibility or a different place in the life of the church for some it will mean a publicly more prominent position for some it will mean a position more behind the scenes and not because prominence means importance but just because god in his wisdom doesn't give all the gifts that church requires to one individual but he spreads them amongst us now again notice that this means two things firstly and i think this is paul's big point is that it means envy has no place in the life of the church this is his primary target wise thinking not thinking of myself more highly than i ought means not desiring a more prominent role for which i'm not gifted that's the way the sinful nature works isn't it church like everything else just becomes a platform on which i can put myself so that i can display my greatness to everybody else and i mustn't think like that about church envy selfish ambition ministry to make a name for yourself will ruin church and ruin you and besides which really

importantly first point prominence in church does not equal greater belonging to church being up front at church each week does not make this my my church this is so important for us to think about because our culture really only values prominence doesn't it we live in a highly individualistic celebrity culture where prominence is considered to be effectively exactly the same as success and success is exactly the same as self-worth right so the only role in church that anyone wants is one that gives them prominence but that's not how it's meant to be and celebrity culture in church kills effectiveness because while celebrities can gather a crowd right they can gather a crowd around themselves people come because they want to listen to them that celebrity is unable to do the main work of church because only christ can do that work and if they're pointing to themselves they're not pointing to the only one who can do the work jesus it seems to me as well that often those gifts in church which bring prominence often come like for paul with his apostleship they bring more suffering too seems that god humbles those he wants to use and disciplines those who gives prominence to but there's a flip side to this as well not only should i not envy and not push myself into a role for which god has not equipped me or gifted me it secondly means that sober judgment of myself means not unnecessarily putting myself down either it means that i'm not to back away from serving it means that seeing how god has gifted me and using me for his glory i will get on with serving because verse five as part of a body the gift that i was given is not actually given to me for my benefit but was given to me for your benefits and vice versa so if for example i refuse to use the gift that god has given me for preaching perhaps because i i'm afraid because people criticize the preacher if you didn't know that they do right i don't want that i'm not going to use that gift or maybe because i think hiding and being uh behind the scenes is is is humble and more godly well that's wrong too it's a failure to understand how god gifts the church for the benefit of the whole so hiding and not serving either because we're afraid or because we don't think our gift is as useful as others that sounds like godliness as we say it but actually it's selfishness because the gift that god has given you he has given it to you for all of our benefit and blessing and sober judgment means knowing what your gifts are and aren't and then working on them improving them and exercising them with your eyes on god's glory and pouring out your heart in love for others now paul then ends this section with a list of gifts in verses six to eight now i take it that you're not meant to look at that list and think that's an exhaustive list and if i don't have one of those seven gifts then i don't have any gift at all that is not the point the point really isn't so much on the gifts themselves the emphasis seems to be on using the gifts you know if your gift is x then make sure you're doing x he repeats over and over again now there's lots that could be said about this list and i'm going to leave you very disappointed by what i don't say but anyway let's have a look at the list together let's firstly deal with prophecy if your gift is prophesying he says then prophecy in accordance with your faith verse six i think this is probably the most tricky one to understand in the list which is because the bible uses the word prophecy in different ways at different times quick tip if you're trying to understand the bible don't just draw a straight line between the word that the bible uses and think that because it's got the same word it means the same thing every single time and it's called a concordance right you can look up the words and it will tell you every place in the bible that that word appears the concordance doesn't tell you what the word means the context tells you what the word means right and you must work on reading it in its context not just from a concordance and i mean that's just how everybody uses language right so the bible's the same and so actually the bible uses the word prophecy in different ways we saw didn't we in the old testament the prophet was a particular status among god's people from someone who received god's word and spoke god's word thus saith the lord they would say and disobeying their word was punished and punishable by death that's not how it's carried on in the new testament it seems so in the new testament jesus fulfills the role of old testament prophet as the word of god so in the writer of the hebrews puts it like this in hebrews 1 verse 1 in the past god spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways but in these last days he's spoken to us by his son that means that in the new testament a prophet is someone who is supernaturally gifted to speak about jesus right if someone claims to be a prophet and they're speaking not about jesus they are not a prophet certainly not in the new testament sense because a prophet is not to free is not free to speak about whatever they like to speak about they are to share god's word about jesus but even then i think the word is used differently in the new testament so in ephesians it seems to say there is a company of so-called prophets who are alongside the apostles in a foundational role the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets it says twice and so as church historians point out the early church particularly say someone like rome is reliant on people verbally passing on the message about

jesus because very little of the new testament existed there and so prophets were passing on this message verbally speaking the message of the apostles

so there's a category in the new testament of prophets now what does that mean prophecy today well for sure god can and does speak directly to individuals to tell them things he doesn't tell them new truths about jesus but he might tell them how those truths about jesus are to be applied or how they work out in a particular situation and what they say must be tested against the scriptures which are complete and are in your hands now today still i don't think that's that close to what the church in rome understood by prophecy here which i think is probably nearer to what good preaching is i think that's probably what they understood someone who through a gift that god has given them is able to take the scriptures and show how they point to jesus and apply them carefully by god's spirit to our lives and our situations what we're doing here is not just passing on of information it's not just my brain plugging into your brain to tell you things you might have not otherwise known so i'm trying to speak god's word to you that you might hear not me but you might hear god not because i'm anybody special but because we are looking together at god's word and he is at work by his spirits and that's the same isn't it for you when you open the bible with someone you are praying that god would give you the words to help explain it to the person that you're speaking to maybe that's in a one-to-one conversation with a friend who's not a christian maybe it's with your nieces or nephews or sons and daughters sat around the dinner table or something maybe it's in youth club god gifts people for the benefit of the church to speak prophetically about jesus and they should do it in accordance with the truth of who jesus is we're going to speed up serving literally the word there is deaconing and that's not going to be controversial to anybody is it serving practically caring for others meeting their needs looking out for what needs to be done if that's what you're good at says paul then get on and do it you should do it you need to do it teaching again distinct from prophecy it seems to be what priscilla and aquila did for apollo in the new testament teaching him to preach more accurately the doctrines of jesus christ that's a role that carries on discipling educating god's people with the truth so that they might understand it if that's your gift then you should use it you should teach get on with it because churches need teachers encouraging literally this is the word to walk alongside somebody to strengthen them to lift them up when they've fallen down to giving them a word in season if that's your gift then you should look for opportunities to do that because goodness me do churches need encouragements we certainly do giving or sharing in the new testament the church was funded by its members just like our churches today and it seemed like some people in the church had an opportunity through the gifts that the lord has given them to carry a more significant portion of that burden than others and paul says if that's you give generously don't withhold the resources that god has given you for the benefit of the church god hasn't given you all of that just for yourself he's given it for the benefit of others so invest it there that's your gift don't hold back churches need generous givers leading again this is qualified with diligence leadership in the church perhaps as an elder or maybe in a specific ministry area is to be done carefully or done well giving a clear lead so that others can follow not confusing them not giving up or walking away not everyone will want to lead will they and not everyone should lead because not everyone's gifted to lead but if you've been gifted to lead you should lead with diligence or zeal seems in the new testament that leaders aren't uh self-appointed that they are recognized if you have the gift of leadership you will know about it not just because you tell yourself it but because people around you want to follow you and ask you to take that responsibility for them and if they don't well don't envy those who do because leadership is actually quite a burden so much so that leaders need to be encouraged to lead diligently and with zeal because they might give up finally showing mercy explained by cheerfulness mercy is showing kindness to people who by definition don't deserve it right and if you're showing kindness to someone who doesn't deserve it it would be easy to become bitter or resentful but don't do that be cheerful because churches are full of people who need your mercy and if that's your role if that's your gift then serve in that way now our time has gone and i realized that there are probably lots of outstanding questions let me just end with some practical applications as i finish really briefly remember the point of this passage is not this it's not like dig really deep in yourself and find out what your gift is and then force that gift on other people that is not what this is saying right please don't do that the point of this passage is to think wisely about yourself see that god in christ has given you a secure place in his church and by his grace has made you to be just the person that the church needs in the way that he has designed you and gifted you and so it means doesn't it that how do i find my gift is not dig inside myself to look for the

way that god has made me no what i do because i assume that god has put me here deliberately i look around me in the church and i say what needs doing here that i could do what needs doing here that i could do what needs doing here that no one else seems to have noticed what needs doing here that would be a real blessing if it was done and it's not being done and i could do it and i'm to assume that god has made that like that deliberately for your service for our good and it's interesting don't just look at the jobs right maybe you're wide like me right and you see jobs all the time don't just look at the jobs look at the people really that's the question isn't it you look around the churches the people what did these people need how can i serve these people what needs doing for that person that i could do that would be a blessing to them that would help them keep walking with jesus because if you can see the need and you can see how you can meet it then you should do that because that's why god has put you here in this church as you belong to jesus and you belong to all of us let me pray and then we'll see heavenly father how we thank you that in your grace and your goodness you have put us all here on exactly the same footing all of us are here because jesus died for us and all of us can have confidence in him that in christ we are all the same we belong to you and we belong to one another and how we pray that you might help us to be a church which thinks rightly about ourselves that we don't think of ourselves more highly than we ought but we think with sober judgment please help us to do that we pray that we might serve one another well and for your glory in jesus name amen