

## 064 Living Tools in the Master's Hand

### Romans 12:3-8

Message by Dr R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church ~ 1/29/17

In a world that is characterized by increasingly rapid change, I continue to be amazed at the timeless nature of Scripture. Paul was writing to church in Rome in about A.D. 58, but might as well have been writing yesterday to Grace Church in Desert Hot Springs.

While situations change, the realities of how humans interact and relate to one another remain remarkably similar.

Paul talks in today's passage about church unity, the distribution and diversity of spiritual gifts, and how people in the church are supposed to behave toward another.<sup>1</sup>

**Romans 12:4,5 *Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.***

One of Paul's favorite metaphors for the church is the human body.

Some distinguish between the church "visible" and "invisible." Not talking about an invisible body! While there are certainly applications to the "church universal," and the need for us to acknowledge our unity with all believers everywhere,<sup>2</sup> my

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<sup>1</sup> Last week we looked at **verse 3** where Paul warned us ***not think too highly of ourselves***. A radical transformation in our self-perception should occur when our minds are renewed. Delivered from the self-centeredness typical of people in the world, the Holy Spirit of God enables us to look at ourselves objectively and realistically.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing causes more damage to a local church than a believer who overrates himself or herself and tries to perform a ministry he or she cannot or is not called by God to do. When each believer has a proper perception of himself/herself and is functioning in the gifts the Spirit has given and equipped them to do, there is tremendous power released!

<sup>2</sup> Many people attempt to unite Christians in a way that is not biblical. E.g. National or World Council of Churches. But notice Paul didn't discuss unity until he had laid the doctrinal foundation that unity must be built upon.

You can't have unity unless it is based on the great foundational truths of the Bible. While we won't all agree on every minor point of doctrine, we do

opinion is that the primary application of "the body" is to the local church. Remember that the very word "church" (Greek *koinonea*) means ***assembly***.

Each human body has many constituent parts. Some are visible, some aren't. We can't see our "vital organs" (like heart, lungs, liver, etc.) but they are what keep us alive.

We have various limbs, which give us the ability to walk, and to reach and pick things up.

We have sensory organs that enable us to perceive the world around us – eyes to see with, ears to hear with, fingers to touch with, tongues to taste with.

When everything is working together in harmony, life is good!

But when one part is sick or injured or paralyzed the whole body suffers.

Just as no part of the human body is non-essential, so there is no such thing as a worthless believer. Some parts of the body are more public than others, and some ministries/gifts are more public than others, but all are absolutely essential for a healthy church.

Three important truths about the church in this verse:

1. **UNITY** – we all derive our life from the same source; none of us can exist outside the body. And we have one head, Jesus Christ, who controls and coordinates each member for the good of the whole. We are one body not in the sense of an outward organization, but of a spiritual organism.
2. **DIVERSITY** – God loves variety. Different *praxis* – function, activity, task. If all were the same, would be a monstrosity, not a body.
3. **MUTUALITY** – we belong to one another and we need one another. When one person is hurting or grieving the whole body feels that pain. When disease attacks, the whole body reacts.  
Let's look at them one at a time.

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agree on the foundation truths of the faith.

## I. UNITY

**Ephesians 4:3 *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.***

***“Make every effort”*** – *“be diligent”* The verb means having a resolute determination to overcome a difficulty, and implies the necessity of exertion. It also includes the idea of being enthusiastic, or as my British friends would say, “keen” about doing so.

Important thing to observe: he doesn’t say it’s our task to produce unity. It is unity ***“of the Spirit”*** – it’s not something we construct, but the result of the Holy Spirit’s supernatural action in bringing together Jew and Gentile, male and female, black brown and white, young and old.

We don’t create that unity, but we are responsible to keep it, to maintain it, to preserve it, to it, to protect it from anything that would destroy it.

Unity is NOT the same as uniformity.

We come in all body types: tall, short, thin, round, muscular, lean. (Notice I did not say beautiful and ugly – all of you are beautiful, because you’re just like God designed you, and true beauty is not a bodily characteristic, but an inner characteristic).

We come in various mental types: nervous, calm, mathematical, non-mathematical, artistic, musical, non-musical, logical, illogical, etc. etc.

We’re all over the map. There are huge differences among us. But despite the endless variety of personalities and temperaments, despite the diverse racial and cultural backgrounds in the church, our unity transcends all differences of background.

We maintain the unity of the Spirit in ***“the bond of peace.”***

I’m amazed at the various glues, epoxies, and other bonding agents that are available at Lowe’s or Home Depot. You can bond wood, plastic, cloth concrete, even metals if you have the right glue.

But even more challenging is bonding people together. What do you use? Paul tells us. Peace is the “superglue” that

binds us together.

Providing the basis of and the reason to maintain our unity are seven things we have in common.

**Vs. 4-6 *“There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”***

Each of the seven great things Paul describes as being “one” originates in, is rooted in God himself, who is never at disagreement, never in disunity in himself. There is

**1. One Body** – (metaphor for the church).

**I Cor. 12:13 *“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given one Spirit to drink.”*** There are not multiple entities, but one. There is unity in the universal church, and there should be unity in the local body of believers.

*Because there is one body, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

**2. One Spirit**

Talking about the Holy Spirit. The church is not a human organization – it is a living organism.

The Holy Spirit draws us, regenerates us, fills us. He places us into the Body of Christ, gives gifts and empowers the individual members of the body so all may function together.

The Holy Spirit is the oil that lubricates and keeps us from becoming irritated with and rubbing against one another.

*Because there is one Spirit, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

**3. One Hope to which we are called**

*“Hope”* isn’t just lukewarm optimism. Biblical hope is an absolute, blazing certainty, a confident expectation based on God’s promises and actions.

Our hope, our sure confidence rests on what God has done for us: it rests in God’s plan in calling us and the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Hope also looks to the future – what throughout Christianity is referred to as *“our blessed hope.”*

Traditionally graveside services conclude: *Unto Almighty God we commit this body to the ground; earth to earth; ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the Body at the return of Jesus Christ, when our corruptible bodies will be changed, and made like his own glorious body; according to His mighty power whereby he is able to subdue all things unto Himself.*

*Because there is one hope to which we are called, because there will be a resurrection, a judgment; because we're all headed to the same place, and because we will spend eternity together, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

#### **4. One Lord**

In the Roman Empire "Lord" was a common way for people to refer to the deity they had chosen to worship, out of a whole array of gods and goddesses they could pick from.

In the church, there are not many Lords, there is only one Lord, and that is Jesus Christ. Say with me: *"Jesus Christ is Lord!"*

As we often sing: *"He Is Lord, he is Lord. He is risen from the dead and He is Lord. Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord."*

Just like there can only be one head on a body, there can only be one Lord in the Body of Christ. When Christ is truly head and the communication is clear everything runs smoothly in a church.

*Because there is one Lord, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

#### **5. One faith**

Commentators argue whether the "one faith" is subjective – our experience of faith, or objective, the content of our faith.

I think it involves both. The objective content is the gospel, which requires our response to it. We believe that God Almighty *sent his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16)*. And it is by our subjective placing our faith in him that we are saved.

**Romans 10:9** *If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

There is only one way to salvation. **John 14:6** *"I am the way, the truth, and the life – no one comes to the Father but by me."* End of story.

*Because there is one faith make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

**6. One baptism.** Baptism is public identification with Christ. Baptism took the people Paul was writing to out of whatever previous religious allegiances they had and marked them as followers of Christ.

The issue isn't whether it happened in a lake or pool or stream or church baptistry, whether it was a lot of water or a little water – the important thing is your identification with Jesus Christ.

Baptism provides the evidence that all Christians, without discrimination of color, sex, age, race, class, share the grace of Jesus Christ.

*Because there is one baptism, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

We have seen the person and work of the Spirit and the person and work of the Son, and Paul culminates with the seventh:

**7. One God and Father.** This was an outrageous claim in the world of Paul's day. For most there were many gods and many lords. Even though a person might worship just one God, he didn't deny that there were many other deities.

But Jews and Christians have insisted that there is only one God.

God is "above all and through all and in all." Three prepositions describe his transcendence, his immanence, and his pervasiveness.

He is above all – he is supreme, he is sovereign. As Barclay writes, we *"live in a God-created, God-controlled, God-sustained, God-filled world."*

He works out his purposes through all believers.

He indwells, he lives in all believers. We are the "church of God"

When it's all said and done, we are all family, brothers and sisters with the same Father.

Because there is one God and Father make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

## II. DIVERSITY

**Romans 12:6-8** *We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. <sup>7</sup>If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; <sup>8</sup>if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

Will hold off talking about the particular gifts until next week. For now, just remember, whatever gift you have been given, USE IT!

## III. MUTUALITY

We form one body and are dependent on one another. We aren't supposed to be "rugged individualists," but to think of ourselves as part of one body.

For a Christian to not use his/her own gifts is to deny the very purpose for which gifts are given, i.e. the **common good (I Corinthians 12:7)**.

**I Peter 4:10** *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*

My question to you is: "how are you using the gifts God has given you? For self, or for the body?"

The church is a whole mechanism, it depends on each one of its members to function properly. When all the body parts don't function the way they were intended to, the body is severely crippled.

Think of it this way. If only 15 percent of our body parts functioned properly, or even 25 percent we would be virtually comatose. In the same way, churches are crippled when many members of its members are unwilling to use their gifts to minister to one another.

Each **cog in a gear wheel** is important. Must work in concert with others.

Spiritual gifts are tools to build with, not toys to play with or weapons to fight with.

E.g. using the different tools in my workshop to build something. Use tape measures and rulers and squares to mark off on board where to cut. Saw to cut, router and chisels and rubber mallet to make the joints, screwdrivers and hammers and glue to hold it together, sandpaper to make it smooth and finally a brush or spray apparatus to apply paint or a clear finish.

Vertically, we are **not our own**, but belong to Christ (**I Corinthians 6:19-20**). Horizontally we belong to each other.

Each of us has a critical part to play. We need one another. In the eyes of God no one gift is any more important than any other. There's no place for pride (no one is **indispensible**) because none of us can function properly without the others.

Today I want to close by briefly sharing the vision and plans for Grace Church that the Lord gave the elders during our two day retreat in December.

Over last few weeks you have seen our Vision statement: **"Attracting people to Christ with love, grace and excellence."**

**Objectives:** –of many good and important things, five objectives we feel we need to focus on and give priority to.

Accomplish our vision by:

1. **Intentionally seeking for more opportunities for bi-lingual/multi-cultural interaction and worship.**  
This is in keeping with our identity statement: we are intentionally bi-lingual, multi-cultural and intergenerational.
2. **Implementing a pathway to leadership and to service**  
Defining the process of coming to faith in Christ, baptism, discipleship, doctrinal and practical training, developing leaders who can take responsibility for various areas of ministry. Thanks to Alberto for hours spent drafting this.
3. **Providing the resources for leaders and for Christian Education program.** Now that we approved of the budget, first step will be in seeking a part-time youth leader. CEF training.

4. **Providing more support for seniors (emphasis on widows and handicapped).** Initial step will be a survey of the needs.
5. **Improving the church facilities - GARY JOHNSON** e.g. solar, parking lot  
Importance of having “buy-in” from whole congregation.  
**SLIDE WITH CLIP ART PEOPLE HOLDING HANDS**  
Will take all of us working together to accomplish them.  
To achieve them requires trusting God and stepping out in faith.  
Current status: congregation is aging, have lost many through death or moving, attendance somewhat lower, giving not what anticipated last year.

Common wisdom time to cut back. But instead at our congregational meeting on Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> we stepped out by faith and approved a budget 5% increase.<sup>3</sup> For details see Gary or myself, also annual reports are available in office (library?)

President Trump has a plan for the U.S. You may or may not agree with it but he does have a plan. More importantly, I believe God has a plan for Grace Church.

**Jeremiah 29:11** *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

Comment: Many of you may have this verse marked in Bibles – a favorite, one you have “claimed as your own.”

But written not to individuals, but to the people of God - the Israelites in captivity in Babylon. The word **you** is plural.

One final verse:

**I Chronicles 1:9** *Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez (which means “pain” or “misery,”) saying “I gave birth to him in pain.”*

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<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 10:36-39 *You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.* <sup>37</sup> For, *“In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.”* <sup>38</sup> And, *“But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.”* <sup>39</sup> *But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.*

**I Chronicles 4:10** *Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” And God granted his request.*

Can you imagine being labeled with the name “pain” or “misery?” The Bible says his mother called him at Jabez because of the physical pain she had giving birth to him.

Reminds me of the story about the Native American Indian boy who asked his father one day, *“How did I get my name”*

His dad said, *“All names among our people have deep meaning. When your oldest brother was born, they put him in my arms, I threw open the flap of the teepee and stepped out into the light, and I saw an eagle fly across the sky. So your older brother is named **Soaring Eagle**.*

*When your younger brother was born, I took him in my arms, I walked out of the tent and I saw a bear running across the mountains. So your brother is **Running Bear**.*

*And now do you understand, **Buffalo Dropping?**”*

You get a name like Buffalo Dropping or Jabez and you have to live with it. Poor Jabez, what was his mother thinking? Why didn’t his dad overrule her name?

Poor Jabez had to live with his name, but he wasn’t limited by his name. He calls out to God to give him another identity than the one his mother gave him and says, *“Bless me.”*

He says, *“Enlarge my territory.”*

He says, *“Let your hand be with me.”* He says, *“keep me from harm.”*

All four of these are various ways of saying, *“help me to be successful! Help the things I’m doing to go better.”*

It is right and good to ask God to bless you. God wants to bless you. He is by nature generous and good and kind. When you tug at your heavenly Father’s coat or crawl up on his lap and ask him to bless you he doesn’t say, *“Don’t bother me with that. I’m too busy.*

God’s heart is delighted when his children come before him with boldness and trust him to be generous with them.

The writer doesn't go in to detail on the how and when, but he tells us that God granted Jabez' prayer.

It's good and proper to bring our requests and our desires for ourselves and for Grace Church to God. But the ultimate purpose isn't just for our blessing. We need to keep a bigger picture in view. It's not just our blessing and our territory and our wants and needs and dreams, but God's kingdom, God's territory, God's justice, the way the world should be according to God that we seek.

Sometimes small churches look at themselves and say, "*Oh, we can't do this and we can't do that because we're too small. We don't have the resources.*" And their vision gets limited by their circumstances. Instead of taking giant steps of faith, they take baby steps, or maybe even step backward.

There's a story of a man who had done something wonderful and the king called him in and told him he could mark as much of the kingdom as he wanted and it would be his.

The man took his staff and traced a line in the dirt around himself. The king watched, and as he finished he exclaimed, "*is that all you want? Just what's in the circle?*"

The man replied, "*NO! I want everything OUTSIDE the circle!*"

What if we drew a line around this building and said we wanted to claim all the territory beyond this place for God? We can take a lesson from the vision of Jabez. Let's not sell ourselves short. Don't put God in a box . . . think of everything that's outside these walls.