

The Measure Of Faith That God Has Assigned

by James Jennings

This sermon delves into the concept of each believer having a specific measure of faith assigned by God to operate within the gifts given to them. It emphasizes the importance of not overworking or going beyond the confidence God has provided, as well as not being lazy but using the gifts with trust and honor to the Lord. The message encourages humility in recognizing God's design for each individual and the need to operate within that design to be a pleasing sacrifice to God.

Scripture: Romans 12:3, 1 Corinthians 15:10, Romans 14:23, 2 Corinthians 9:7, 1 Timothy 5:17

Topics: "Faith", "Humility in Service"

Description

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Transcript

Turn to Romans 12. This is going to be a follow-up message to a sermon I gave a month and a half ago on us being one living sacrifice. Jews and Gentiles united to please God.

If you remember that, I sought to look at the start of what Paul says here in Romans 12. But I want to go a little further this morning and then, Lord willing, in the future, some more messages looking specifically at some of these gifts that Paul lists in verses 6, 7, and 8. This message is going to be a little technical, so I'm going to try as hard as I can to articulate things in a way that's clear. But that's one of the difficulties in preaching is taking profound truth and presenting it in a clear way.

So, I need the Lord's help to do that. But Romans 12, let's read the first eight verses. I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies, and as I emphasized last time, as a singular living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your, plural, that's us together, our spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, acceptable, and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think,

but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith. And that's going to be one of the main things we're looking at.

That phrase, the measure of faith that God has assigned. So there's something called a measure of faith that God has assigned. Meaning it's been given to you, to me.

Verse 4, For as in one body, we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function. So we, though many, are one. So He's keeping this idea of a singular body throughout.

We are one body in Christ. And individually members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given.

That's another phrase. He already used it a little earlier on. He uses it again.

The grace given to us. Then He says about these gifts, let us use them. If prophecy, use it in proportion to our faith.

Verse 7, If service, use it in our serving. The one who teaches in his teaching, the one who exhorts in his exhortation, the one who contributes in generosity, and the one who leads with zeal. The one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness.

And then, we're going to stop there, but He goes on to talk about the vital importance of your love being genuine. Right? Anywhere, even in 1 Corinthians, when Paul deals with the spiritual gifts, not far away is this topic of love. And that's important to recognize.

So let's pray, and then we're going to dive into this. Father, Lord, I thank You for these precious believers. I thank You for bringing us here today.

Lord, I pray You would help. Help in this hour. Help in the baptism and the seeing.

Lord, in the preaching later and the study later today, Lord, we're just needy beggars looking to You for some food. And You are delighted, Lord, not just to give us some crumbs on the floor, but You've set us at Your table. And so, Lord, what type of people are we? It's just a miracle, Lord, to be seated in the heavenlies even right now.

Lord, we can barely comprehend it. Things, truths that are so vast beyond, Lord, our tiny little minds. And Father, I pray You'd help me to help these saints today as I seek to deliver a message from these words.

Help, please, in Jesus' name, Amen. So, Paul, you want me to be a living sacrifice. You want us to be a living sacrifice that is pleasing to God.

We all want to be pleasing to God. What's one of the first steps in that sacrifice being pleasing that he talks about here right at the start? And what's Paul's answer? What's one of these first things? He wants you to think about what? About yourself. That's a little uncomfortable, isn't it? People tend to not want to think much about themselves in a right way, but he wants you to think about how you think about yourself.

He wants you to have a correct self-perception. A correct self-perception is vital. What is the danger, Paul recognizes, that you and I could have about how we perceive ourselves? The danger could be what? Pride.

A high view of self. Thinking more highly, he says right there, of ourselves than we ought to think. He says that in v. 3. And obviously, if we've got people here, or if any of us are here today thinking too highly of ourselves, that will affect the pleasing aroma of the fragrance that this church, this community of believers puts forward to each other and to the lost and dying world.

Are they smelling the aroma of Christ? Or are they smelling something that is different? And so, I want to start by doing some imaginary role-playing to help you get what Paul is maybe getting at or get at some of these questions that these believers would have maybe been asking. And so, the dialogue between Paul and a Roman believer named... we're going to call him Roman. A Roman believer named Roman.

So imagine with me, the Roman... not the Roman, Roman, that's his name. He looked at Paul and he says, okay, Paul, I want to be part of this body that offers itself as a pleasing, living sacrifice again and again. Not a one-time sacrifice, but a living sacrifice that is pleasing to the Lord.

I want that. Where do I start? What's really important for me to be pleasing in a part of this? And Paul, he looks and he says, well, Roman, just as I was saying, you need to have an ongoing and a transformed mind. You need to be transformed in your mind.

Roman says, okay, but what specific area, Paul, do you want me to be transformed in my mind? What specific things specifically are you speaking about? And Paul says, I want you to be transformed in how you think about yourself. There's a way not to think and there's a way you ought to think. And Roman, maybe he would respond and say, oh, well, I do think about myself as being justified in Jesus Christ.

That's what you taught in Romans 4, right, Paul? Is that what you're talking about, Paul? You want me to think about myself as being justified and having no condemnation? What would Paul say in Romans 12? Is that what he's thinking about in Romans 12? He'd say, no, no, Roman, that's true. You are, yea, justified. Oh, what a thought.

But that's not my point here in Romans 12. So, they continue on in their dialogue. Roman says, oh, I do think about myself as being obedient from the heart.

Is that what you want me to think about, Paul? Do you want me to think about the truth in Romans 6 that I am a new man in Christ and my old man has died? Is that what Paul's talking about in Romans 12 when he says he wants you to have a correct self-perception about yourself? Is that what he's talking about here? No, he's not. He's already dealt with that in the chapters leading up to where we find ourselves. So Paul might say, true, that's true, you've been regenerated.

You're a new man. Yes, you need to know that. That's what the therefore was there for at the start of Romans 12.

But that's not what I want you to think about right here. You must think first about all the doctrines according to your salvation before you get to chapter 12, right? That's why Paul dealt with all of that leading to where he is. Without which, you won't be able to live out Romans 12 and be pleasing and being fruitful.

So Paul might say, Roman, the Lord who has signed unto you salvation, as I spoke to you even dramatically in Romans 9, before you were ever born, God has done such in His sovereign work. But Roman, He's also assigned to you a specific spiritual purpose by which you can be involved in offering worship to the Lord. He's given you a specific grace and a measure of faith.

He's given you specific spiritual gifts. That, Roman, is what I'm specifically thinking about right here when I talk to you about how you think about yourself. I don't want you to think more highly of yourself than you are when it comes to this area.

Not justification, not regeneration, not sovereign election, but to God's spiritual design of you as a Christian. I want you to think about this soberly. And so Roman might say to Paul, Paul, you want me to examine myself.

I understand you're right. Not the aspects of my salvation, but God's spiritual design of me. Paul would say, yes, that's exactly what I'm getting at here with you, Roman.

And again, Roman might say, this makes me nervous. This looking inwardly. If I look inwardly, isn't there a danger, Paul? You want me to think not too highly of myself, but while I think about whether I think too highly of myself, Paul, won't I fall into thinking highly of myself? I mean, Roman could overthink this.

And Paul does say, Roman, the danger is you could become very proud. Yes, you could. But you know what the danger is? You could be proud by not being willing to think about yourself, right? By just not even processing all of this.

And sure, Paul says, not to think more highly of himself. Paul could have, he could have mentioned these three reasons. Roman, you could think too highly of yourself and be full of pride by what? Thinking you're something you're not, right? We tend to think about that aspect of pride.

Number two, you could rightly realize the gifts God has given you, but you still could have pride by rightly realizing the gifts you have. If it enters in in some way that you think that you've earned it, and it's not been given by grace. And then Paul says a third thing to Roman.

He says you could have pride by feeling bad you're not gifted in the way you wish. And Roman says, wait, how is the last item being prideful? How is it being proud to feel bad about not having a gift that I hoped I would have? And Paul says, Roman, humility is content with God's design. So when you feel bad about how you are designed, this is pride being discontent and bothered that others are something you are not.

That you being envious of them. And that too will lead you to not have harmony and you won't be a sacrifice pleasing to the Lord. And so Roman, he then says, Paul, is there a danger for everyone? And look what Paul says in 12 verses three.

Who's he speaking to? For by the grace given me I say to who? Everyone among you. Meaning all of us are vulnerable to be inclined to this danger of thinking of ourselves in a way that is too high, that is proud. It's not just the teachers and the preachers who Paul is going after.

Even in this list he goes on, he talks about those who give. And he talks about those who show acts of mercy. And so Paul says, Roman, you should find great comfort in the truth that God does not call you to be what He has not made you to be in His kingdom.

Whether a doorkeeper or a preacher, a hand or a foot, if you're faithful to God's design, that's pleasing to God. To do so is not to fail because you didn't live up to your full potential. You know, the world uses that.

They're always saying there's a greater potential. There's a greater potential. What if the very life you're living of faith and the gifts you have, the Bible doesn't tell me there's necessarily a greater potential.

It's wanting you to be faithful with that which God has given you. And Paul would tell Roman here in this imaginary role play, Roman, you must appreciate others and how the Lord has designed them for they are there for your good too. Just as a body needs many members to work properly.

So remember, whatever you are and have is from the Lord. It's all a gift that God has assigned. So whatever gift you have, don't act like you don't have it, but use it to serve the brethren.

And then Roman says, but will I not fall into pride if I reflect upon myself and how the Lord has designed me? Paul says, pride should be eliminated when you realize that your faith is a gift from God. Think, brethren, if I really realize my salvation is a gift, the spiritual gifts are a gift, what is there to be proud about? I mean, there's nothing to be proud about. It's not a result of my own knowledge.

Who is responsible for the gifts that I possess? The Lord. So technically, when you think about yourself and how God's designed you, it should actually give you the greatest humility because you're looking at all these things that have been graciously given and that are not of your own doing. You could say the gifts are like a tool you've inherited.

You can't boast about it. You just inherited it from the Lord. And so, Roman then says to Paul, thank you, Paul.

I must think soberly and not have a drunken self-perception of myself. But Paul, I need to think soberly according to what standard? And then Paul says what he says in verse 3. He says to Roman, you need to think according to the measure of faith God has assigned. Roman says, what does that mean? The measure of faith.

Paul says, I'm sorry. I'm in paradise with the Lord. And it seems in the last 2,000 years, there have been multiple interpretations on what I meant.

So your poor, pitiful preacher right now at the 10 a.m. will have to interpret what I meant from his context and answer your question. Hopefully, you'll be able to understand him. Brethren, there are at least four main views on what Paul means by measure of faith.

I went ahead and ripped all that out because I realized I didn't have enough time if I went and looked at all of those. So I'm just going to put forward what I believe it's teaching and seek to prove that to you and draw some application and seek to help your souls. This has been a help to mine.

Okay. So look at Romans 12. For by the grace given, there you got one of these phrases.

I say to every one of you not to think of myself. So Paul's saying what he's saying by the grace given. And then he says, don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but think with sober judgment to what? Each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Well, if you don't know where the ruler and the reference point are, it's impossible to think rationally about a certain topic, right? If we had a tape measure over the wall and I said, let's all measure how tall we are, we would know where to go. There it is. Let's go over there, walk over there.

It's pretty clear. You stand up there, oh, he's six foot six and you're this height and that height. That's pretty easy.

So Paul wants me to think soberly according to a measure of faith. So in order to understand and apply what he's saying, I got to figure out what this measure of faith is. And even this grace given.

And is there any nuance in what Paul is saying here that's really important for me to know as a Christian? So that's what we're going to consider because you can't leave here today thinking soberly about yourself according to the measure of faith if you don't know what the measure of faith is. Does that make sense? You guys understand? So that's what I'm going to try to show you. And what I'm about to share is a common view.

This is nothing new. I've not created some new thing. This is a common view, but there are multiple views as you study this out.

It can be difficult. But here the first question is that I want to ask you guys. Because when you're studying this, one of the first things you're wanting to think is is the grace given? Is that statement, the grace given, which is two times, and then you've got the statement, the measure of faith, and then in v. 6, the one who prophesied, in proportion to our faith.

Now the measure of faith in proportion to our faith might not be referring to the same thing. Maybe they are. And then you've got the grace given.

Paul talks about that. Are the measure of faith and the grace given referring to the same thing? This is one of the first questions to ask when you're trying to define these terms in the context. That's one of the questions we should ask.

So does the term measure of faith speak of the volume or degree and extent of spiritual gifts imparted to a person? When Paul says according to the measure of faith, in other words, is the measure of faith saying according to the spiritual gifts God has given you? Is that all Paul is saying when he says that? Or is there something distinct about measure of faith? And whatever this measure of faith is, I trust you see it from the text, it's something God has assigned. And we're not to think too highly about ourselves in regards to something that God has assigned to us. He's given it to us.

So here's another question. What terminology does Paul clearly use in the passage that seems to clearly speak about the spiritual gifts being given to a person? Look at 12.6. Having gifts. He's talking about spiritual gifts there when he uses that word gifts.

Because he says that differ. And then he attributes the gifts that differ according to what? Grace given. According to the grace given to us.

So whatever this grace given to you, to me, to all of us, remember, he's speaking to who? Verse 3, everyone among you. This is applicable to every Christian. You can't leave the room and think this doesn't apply to you.

This is for all of us. So, grace given. Clearly, he's not using the word grace here just to talk about salvation, justification in that sense that in Romans 5 and other places he's used it.

He's no doubt talking about something under the broad banner of salvation in Christ. And what specific thing he's thinking about is with salvation, it's not just you're graciously given the righteousness of Christ, but underneath that, you're graciously given gifts. It's a free thing assigned to you by God.

A spiritual design and a giftedness that God has given each and every one of us. And he says the gifts that differ according to the grace. So meaning, the grace given brings about the gifts in the person's life.

And that would make sense of how he says in v. 3. He says grace given again there. Look at v. 3. For by the grace given. So there he's using it before v. 6. Grace given meaning, yes, his apostleship, but beyond that, his even ability to teach as an apostle.

For by the grace given, by God's design of me, I say to every one of you not to think more highly of himself. So Paul's sermon, Paul's teaching, the fact he's even writing Romans 12, why does that even happen? God's graciously done this. God's graciously saved this man and He's given him an understanding and He's given him truth and now He's proclaiming that to us.

Isn't that something? Any sermon is really a gift from God to the preacher and the very one who's even trying to proclaim the very Word of God. We were so cast on the Lord. And back in Romans 1, He said, I long to see you that I might impart to you some spiritual gift.

Well, I don't think that spiritual gift in Romans 1 is talking like I'm going to teach you and then you're going to all become teachers and have a spiritual gift you didn't have before. He's using it there just to talk about spiritual gift. You're going to benefit from the truth.

So think of this, Paul through his spiritual gift and his apostleship and his teaching and his preaching, imparts to them a spiritual gift of truth by which to benefit their souls. And this is all happening by grace. This is something you can boast in.

He's doing this because this is how God has designed him. Okay, we also see some similar language like this, and you could even flip there in your Bibles. Ephesians.

Look at Ephesians 4. He's talking about us having one God. Verse 6, and then he says, but grace was given. Grace was given to each one of us.

And then he mentions where this grace given to all of us came. And he uses that same word, the measure, the proportion, the degree of Christ's gift, right? So Christ, when He's come to save us, what does it say right there in verse 8? He says He gave gifts to men. And then Paul goes on here to talk about some of these gifts.

Verse 11, He gave apostles and the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, et cetera. But here he says the grace given to each one of us is according to the measure of Christ's gift. So it's a degree of gifting that is given to us graciously by God.

But Paul again here describes it as grace given, thinking specifically about the spiritual gifts. So go back to Romans 12. So what I'm saying is spiritual gifts like teaching, serving, exhorting, giving, as you see in Romans 12, 7, and as you saw in Ephesians 4, it keeps using this language that Christ has this measure, this capacity by which He's given these gifts to men.

And when that's given, the Bible is defining that as grace has been given to you and to me. It's coming from Christ for Christ's church to build up Christ's community that we might be conformed to the image of Christ. Right? It's very Christ-centered.

Now, I say all this because I think Paul is saying something different by measure of faith. I don't think he's talking about the same thing. I don't think it's interchangeable that he's using grace given with measure of faith.

So I hope I tried to prove to you the grace given from the context of Romans 12, even from Ephesians 4, seems more like that's focusing on the spiritual gifts given to the Christian. Okay, so what about the measure of faith? That we have that was assigned by God and we're supposed to think soberly about it. If we don't know what it is, we can't think soberly about it.

Right? At least that's how I think. Again, where's the ruler to go line up on the wall? So I don't think this is another way of Paul saying the same thing. I do think there's overlap just like with salvation proper, grace given, salvation.

You've got multiple layers here of different things happening and there is going to be some overlap, especially with the word grace. I think Paul's adding in another factor to the equation of you and I that we should think about with how God has designed us. And this illustration is going to fail.

I was talking to my wife about it on the way here. And I just thought, ah, it's not perfect. I realize it's not.

Maybe I should have tried to use an illustration from the body because Paul talks about the body. But think of your car's dashboard. You've got multiple gauges on there.

Two of the gauges on the dashboard in the car are the speedometer and the fuel gauge. Right? The speedometer, don't think about it so much as what speed am I going, but think about the max speed. Do all cars have the same max speed and ability to go at a certain rate? No, they don't.

They don't. There's a varying degree of the max speed by which that car can go. And the speedometer is, in this case, indicating that.

What's the fuel gauge doing? What's the fuel gauge indicating to you? How much gas you got in the tank for how much longer you can operate? Right? I mean, if it's near the bottom and another guy's is up here, who's going to operate longer at that capacity? It's going to be that person. It's not going to be you. You've got a lower amount of fuel.

So, I'm going to say in this case, the grace given is the speedometer, right? It refers to being spiritually gifted to drive at a certain speed. Meaning, do I have a gift of teaching, of exhorting, of showing acts of mercy? Some of these things he says right here. I can't change that.

God's designed me. He's made me that way. I've got to be content with that and seek to operate and do the best I can to be pleasing to the Lord as this body offers itself as a living sacrifice.

Paul's already said here, he couldn't teach if it wasn't for the grace of God given him. The only reason you and I can do anything with any gifts is because God has given them to us. There's no room for boasting.

Okay, then there's the fuel gauge. The measure of faith. And I'm going to say that by measure of faith, or you could say there's a measure of confidence, there's a measure of trust, there's a degree of faith, there's a degree of trust that Paul is saying has been assigned to each and every Christian.

I don't think he's talking about some supernatural gift of faith here because he's just talking to everyone among you. Every one of us has been given some degree or measure of faith. And if all the measure of

faith is saying is the spiritual gifts, then maybe we're going to miss something that Paul's actually saying in the midst of what he's trying to say here.

And so the measure of faith Paul speaks to, and I'm going to try to say this in multiple ways throughout the next 10 minutes to hopefully have it hit home, is differing levels of confidence and trust by which believers have to exercise and use the gifts God has given them. Remember that word exercise. If you look at 12.6, gifts that differ according to the grace given.

And then he says what? Let us use them. Okay, Paul, I'm ready. I'm going to go use these gifts.

What's the first one? Then he says if prophecy, if using that gift, do so in proportion to what? Our faith. Someone will argue that's talking about faith as in sound doctrine. Don't prophesy unless it's according to sound doctrine.

I think they're overreacting to charismania and all the heresy out there. Of course, if someone prophesies, it should be consistent and tested and weighed with the very Word of God. But he's talking about our faith.

The same idea of measure of faith is what I'm going to argue for. And so I want you to use the gift. And that guy's a gift to prophesy.

That guy's a gift to prophesy. But they each have a measure of faith and a degree of confidence and trust by which to use the gift. Remember back to the fuel gauge.

They both got the same model of car, the same speed, the same gift. But when you step back, you see, oh, one guy, he's got less gas in the tank. The other guy's got a lot more gas.

That being faith and confidence to use this gift. In other words, Paul's telling us not all the people with the same gift will be able to use their gift at the same pace as another with the same gift. You have two exact cars, same speedometer, max speed, but different amounts of fuel and capacity by which to use the gift.

And so when one of the Abrams tanks pulls off the road to refuel, and another just drives by with half of a tank of gas left, whose design is that? God's. So you don't fault the tank stopping to get the gas, because God designed them in that way. The one who's resting is no less spiritual.

It's God's design. He has no faith to exercise the gift at the same pace as the other, because God's given them a different measure of confidence by which to use that which God has designed in him or her. And to me, this is important.

We're going to look at this, because I think often we just think about this factor of, oh, if you're a foot, be content being a foot, even though you can't be a hand, be content that will not change. And we should think of that. You should be content.

If God made you a foot, if he made you a hand, be the best hand and the best foot you can be. What do we often not think about? You got multiple feet, and one of them seems to do more. Oh, that foot must be, he must be more spiritual than the other foot.

Wait a minute. What if God's given them a different measure of faith by which to operate and use the very gifts that God has given him? A gift given by God cannot be guaranteed to be used at the same rate by all the people with the same gift. They must operate within the fuel gauge of faith that God has put into their vehicle.

Thomas Schreiner, he says it like this. Paul's point here is that prophecy should be exercised in proportion to one's personal faith. The word proportion is virtually synonymous with the word measure above.

He's just making as many make the argument that in verse 6, the proportion of faith and the measure of faith from verse 3 are interchangeable. Prophets might be tempted to prophesy beyond the faith given by God, perhaps to impress others with their charismatic ability. Meaning they do that which they had no confidence and trust that God was in.

MacArthur says it this way, in this context, a measure of faith seems to refer to the correct measure of spiritual gift in this and its operating features that God has sovereignly bestowed on every believer. Every believer receives the exact gift and the exact resources best suited to fulfill his role in the body of Christ. Every person has his own special but limited set of capabilities.

You hear that? Resources. We all don't have the same resources. You may have the same gift as another, but a different degree of resources, a different degree of measure of faith.

MacArthur goes on to say, trying to operate outside these capabilities produces frustration, discouragement, guilt feelings, and ultimate defeat. We fulfill our calling when we function according to God's sovereign design for us. And so Paul, he wants you to use your gift.

He says, use your gift in proportion to something. You can only use it within the degree of trust you have that this is honoring God. Don't overuse it, don't burn out, don't have some wrong pressure to go beyond God's design for your life.

I mean, that's one of the reasons he so much wants you to think soberly about this. It's not just you think more highly of yourself in that you say, oh, I'm a mouth when I'm actually a foot. No, you might think more highly of yourself by saying, oh, I am a mouth, but you know what? As a mouth, oh, I need to talk this much and I need to, let's use me for example.

Okay, I'm involved in the preaching and the teaching of the church. If I had, am I like Steve Lawson where he can preach three sermons every week? No, I'm not. And as many courses as I've done to try to hone the gift of preaching, there's actually a measure of confidence and trust to use the gift that God's given me.

And it's not like I can just soar above that. I'm making an effort to be the best preacher I can be, but there's certain things, brethren, you can't change. And that's right to recognize that.

That's not a sinful discontentment. Think of this. And I got this insight from my mother-in-law.

1 Corinthians 15, 10. I'd sent her trying to define measure of faith to get her thoughts, and she mentioned this verse. 1 Corinthians 10, 15.

And you might not pick up on what, listen to this. But by the grace of God, I am what I am. So again, he's attributing it to the grace of God.

His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them. Is that an arrogant statement by Paul? No.

Why did Paul work harder than any of them? What answer does he give? We gotta get this. Though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Wait, wait, Paul.

He says I worked harder. I had more fuel than any of the other apostles, and he doesn't say it's because the other apostles were lazy. That's not the reason he gives.

He says it wasn't actually him. It was God's design for him to work as hard as he did, and he had the faith and the confidence to exercise the gift to the degree he was, because that's what God had made him to do. And he was living inside of that.

Paul sees his intense labors were not the result of his own power, but actually displayed God's power at work in his life. And so the reason he worked harder than any of them, it wasn't actually him. You get what I'm saying? Paul, is Paul thinking highly of himself right here in 1 Corinthians 15:10? Is that a proud man? No, that's a humble man who recognizes the design of God on his life.

He recognizes he even worked harder than the rest. He doesn't take that credit, because he realizes it was the grace of God at work in him. He had been given not just the grace given and the gifts, but he had been given a measure of faith and a trust by which to use those gifts that God had given him.

And this is very freeing. This should be very, very freeing. And you might say, someone might say, well, would you say that Paul's labor is a response to the grace of God? Or do you see that his labor is an effect of that grace? It's brought about by the powerful grace at work in Paul's life.

Whose activity is ultimate work in Paul? God's. Whose activity is ultimate work in you and me? God's. So, you have two people, both have been given the grace to a specific position or gift in this living body of Christ where we're all seeking to be a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord.

However, the measure of faith and confidence by which to exercise and use those gifts is different. Two believers with the same spiritual gifts exercise those at a different frequency based on the measure of faith or they exercise them in a different way based on the measure of faith that the Lord has given them, the measure of trust, of confidence in God to do these very things. So, believers who are within their abilities in doing so, trusting the Lord or honoring Him.

Those who try to be something God has not designed them to be are not being pleasing to the Lord. And those who know what God has designed them to do yet overwork themselves outside of this confidence and trust that this is pleasing to God, not only are they going to get burned out, but if you do that, you're working outside the realm of God's design and you're not really pleasing to the Lord. It'd be better to take a seat and please God in that way than overwork without having a conscience that's clear, a trust that this is honoring to God.

And so, brethren, we often tend to focus on people being lazy and neglecting to use their gifts, but what about those overworking beyond God's design for them? How much do you think about those people? I mean, He made us to be zealous for good works. Amen, He did. But I don't just take Titus 2:14 about that and just assume my zeal is indicative I'm actually doing good works.

Could be doing works that are hindering the advance of the Gospel. There could be something I don't even recognize in myself. And so to further solidify this position, turn to Romans 14.

We see as we move through Romans, I think there's something here to note in how Paul talks in chapter 14. Verse 1-2, as for the one who's weak in faith, well, he doesn't have the trust, right? He doesn't have the confidence that this honors God to eat a certain food or to work on a certain day. Paul says, welcome him.

Don't quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything. You hear that? One believes he may eat anything.

He's got that measure of faith to eat anything and while the weak person eats only vegetables, let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. And he talks, he says in verse 4, it's before his own master, he will stand or fall and he will be upheld for the Lord is able to make him stand. So it's interesting.

A person lacks the trust to eat. They lack a trust. They don't believe they should eat that food, so they don't.

If they eat the food, they're condemned. I think in a similar way, not the same, but the similar way he's talking about faith here, this trust, I think that's the idea in Romans 12, 3 or in 7, with proportion of faith and a measure of faith. You believe you can do this.

You believe it's honoring to the Lord. You don't have all this doubt as you engage in that which you're doing. So Romans 14, if you lack the trust, don't eat.

Romans 12, if you lack the trust that it honors God to accept a certain preaching engagement or to exercise hospitality at a certain point with a certain family, and you go ahead and you do that anyways, and you don't have a confidence, you don't believe you should partake in that, well, I have the gift. I got to use the gift all the time at every opportunity. No, if you don't have trust it's honoring to the Lord, or don't, even if another has the same gift and they're driving on and you must refuel.

That's fine. Work within the confidence God has given you. You see, there's someone who lacks confidence to do something.

They lack the faith, the trust that it honors the Lord to eat something. They're doubting, yet if they do it anyway, she says they're condemned. They don't have the trust that it honors the Lord to eat this food.

So we don't want to come along and wrongly encourage them, hey, you better eat that food when they don't have the faith to do it. In the same way, I might discern someone as a specific gift and you say, oh, we always just got to stir people up. I'm all about stirring people up to use gifts they're not using.

But there's also another side. You put a wrong pressure on them to do something where they don't really have faith that it's honoring the Lord. They can't really do it in good faith.

And then you end up causing them to sin and be condemned by engaging and using their gift at a time when they shouldn't and at a frequency which God has not given them the confidence to use that gift. So, if you keep going to Romans 14, we know verse 23, and I know there's different ways you can take this text. Paul, again, Paul doesn't want you just to identify how God has gifted you.

He wants you to use the gift at a pace by which He has given you the confidence to use it. Romans 14, 23, whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from a faith is sin.

And I don't think he's saying whatever doesn't proceed from faith as in sound doctrine is sin. Back to Romans 12, 6 with those who prophesy. I don't think that's his point.

I think his point is they lack confidence. If they lack faith that it honors the Lord to eat, then don't eat. And then Paul actually gives a broader principle to this that I would argue he was already teaching in chapter 12 with this saying of the measure of faith.

And he's saying, Christian, in your life, it's not just eating. It's not just using the gifts. You look at anything you're doing and you're engaged in.

Can you go and take a step in that direction and believe this is honoring God by me doing this? And if I doubt, and it's not some doubt of James 1 you're being tossed to and fro and there's a really hard condemnation on a sinful type of doubt, but there's a doubt this isn't honoring God. If there's a roadblock there and God put it there, stop the car. Don't drive through it.

That will not be for your good. It will not be for the body's good. It will not be for the church's good.

So if they lack faith and confidence that it honors the Lord to eat, then don't eat. So he couldn't eat the food with a clear conscience and believe it honored the Lord. His faith wouldn't allow him to operate and go and eat that food.

If there was a roadblock, he couldn't move forward. Then he should not eat. And so I think back to Romans 12, 7. I mean, Paul's saying, if you have the gift of prophecy, don't get up and prophesy outside of the proportion of confidence that God has given you to do so.

Don't exercise the gift. If you're doubting, go forward, believing it is pleasing to the Lord. And someone says, I don't like this.

This is subjective. Brethren, what are we walking by? Faith. Not by sight.

I mean, go figure. Are there subjective elements in the Christian life? Walking by the Spirit? Are there objective standards? Yeah, I'm not saying there are not. But we walk by faith, not by sight.

And in all of our zeal, maybe some of you, you're hearing me and you're saying, I think the right response, James, is there's people who are lazy and they're not using their gifts because they're afraid. Could there be people here who that fits you? Sure. But remember, that's one category.

I think the other category that often is not dealt with enough is you've got people operating outside a measure of faith and engaging in more activity that they don't have a trust that is honoring God, even though they have the gift to do the very things they're doing. They're getting burned out and they think it's honoring the Lord when it's not. They're going beyond this proportion, as I put it, of the fuel gauge.

Paul does say, let us use them, right? He says that right there. Let us use them. That is, these gifts.

He wants them to be used and he wants us to be devoted. He goes on to say, the one who teaches, if you look at v. 7, the one who teaches in his teaching. He doesn't say the one who teaches in his contribution.

Why would he say the one who teaches in his teaching? I think his point is if you're a teacher, be devoted to do that. Like don't give yourself the ten things, but give yourself to that specific aspect that God has designed you to be. He says the one who contributes, how should he do so? In generosity.

Meaning, be devoted to that which God has designed you. So yes, as Hebrews 10.24 says, let us stir up, consider how to stir one another up to love and good works. That's one of the purposes of gathering here

this morning.

And you might be thinking, James, this isn't really stirring me up to love and good works. I would argue, this truth in Romans 12, it should stir you up to more love and good works that are actually honoring God. A bunch of believers using the gifts God has given them and operating within the confidence God has given them to use those gifts.

Above all, doing it with a genuine love. Do you know what that's not going to lead to? Jealousy. Envy.

Burnout. Discouragement. And all of a sudden, we're going to be all the more a pleasing sacrifice.

And even I thought of this. I thought what if what I'm saying actually stirs someone up to do less work? And let's say God's really designed you to show mercy. And you realize, I'm not showing mercy with cheerfulness.

And from what I can tell, there's no sin in my heart that's leading me to do that. I'm not grieving the Spirit, but I'm struggling to show mercy with cheerfulness. There's all these opportunities.

Well, what if your present actions of using the gift that God has given you, it's not by faith. You're not doing it trusting the Lord. Maybe there's some sort of pressure.

If you step back from doing something you're not doing by faith, and you go and you rest in the Lord by faith, that actually makes the church more pleasing to the Lord than you go on trying to do that, which you have no confidence that it's honoring God. You have no sense that this is what the Lord is wanting me to do. You stop that, it's going to make us more pleasing to God.

So yes, some of you, maybe you need to work less and that'll make us more pleasing as a church. Something to think about. Even think of this.

Paul deals with something similar in 2 Corinthians 9. Don't turn there, but each one must give as He has decided in his heart. Not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Giving financially, showing generosity, God loves what? A cheerful giver.

The person who gives under compulsion, that is worse to be giving whatever amount. A certain amount a year, and you're doing it under compulsion. Go give less and do it cheerfully, believing it's honoring the Lord.

That's more honoring to God. He wants your heart, brethren, more than some external outworking. And the only way the external outworking of faith is going to be pleasing to God is if the heart is doing it in a trust to the Lord.

1050. So one thing we see in all of this is that the very faith you have to exercise the gifts and honor the Lord is something God has given you. Talk about being humbled.

I try to exercise the gift. I try to do all I can to hone the gift of teaching, to grow. Yet at the end of the day, I'm faced with the sobering reality.

There is a measure of confidence in faith. There is a type of gift that God has given me. And at the end of the day, my ability to exercise that is actually going to be kept within some invisible bounds that I can't see.

No, I don't want to excuse myself of growth because of some invisible bounds, but at the same time, I don't want to kill myself by not recognizing there is that. Should I avoid laziness? Yeah. But I should also try avoiding being something I am not.

Whatever I am, I'm called to think humbly about it. This type of thinking is pleasing to the Lord and produces harmony within the church. Christian, you should never feel some sort of false, satanic condemnation that you're not doing something someone else is doing.

God hasn't designed you to do that very thing. That's actually your pride feeling insecure that God hasn't made you like them. So, in conclusion, each of us, when we're saved, has not just been given specific spiritual gifts that's the grace given for building up the Lord's community within this church, but we've also been given a certain measure of faith by which to operate and exercise in using those gifts.

And I've likened those to two different gauges. You've got a max speed. You've got a certain gift, Christian.

You might not know it yet. Don't worry about that. It will become evident as time progresses.

And you've got a certain capacity that goes with that gift, a certain measure of faith, a certain proportion, and a certain degree by which to use whatever gifts God has given you. And I really think this is so neglected in how certain people think and even how I think in my own walk with Christ and being pleasing to the Lord. So, in Paul's mind, the issue is not just you're thinking more highly of yourself because you have a gift another doesn't have, but you're thinking more highly of yourself because you have a confidence by which to use the gift that the other guy with the same gift doesn't have.

And so something happens there. And I even think Paul kind of uses this category in 1 Timothy 5. He says, let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. I mean, here you've got multiple elders in a church and some are laboring.

They have a confidence to use a certain gift more than others. It's not always the case, but often that's the case. Well, God gave them a greater proportion of faith to use the tool.

Praise God for that. You identify that in the individual and you encourage them to use that gift to that extent. You think of Christ, the parable of the talents, of the manias, the money.

Each is given a specific amount of resource and called to be a good steward of such. There's this principle in Scripture. 1 Corinthians 4, Paul said, who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you didn't receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? I mean, brethren, what can I boast in? Nothing.

It's all the Lord. It's all the Lord. God is ultimately responsible for our differences, for our design, and we must attribute those distinctions to the Lord who has made a diverse body of believers here.

And I really think this is a freeing reality. And yes, for the sake of balance, sure, some might think, well, 2 Timothy 1, he tells Timothy this reason I remind you to fan into the flame the gift of God. This is a gift Timothy already has.

He already has it. Which is in you through the laying on of my hands. It became evident in the time of the laying on of hands that Timothy was designed in a specific way.

And some would argue in 1 Timothy, out of fear he was not using the gift as he should be. Out of fear. And Paul uses this metaphor to rekindle the fire that is going out.

Some of you might need a fire to be rekindled. That could be the right course of encouragement for you. Or some might be out there making a fire and going beyond how God's designed them and they've got to stop.

You've got to put that out. It's kind of like the kids over there playing with matches or something like that. It's like, whoa, this is dangerous.

You're not ready for this. This isn't what God has designed. Now, all this begs this question.

Paul makes it come across like the self-perception is something you and I personally do. Why does that make some uncomfortable? Well, first, brethren, think of this. You've got to see it.

You need to think about it. Because at the end of the day, who's got to humbly recognize what's true of themselves? You! I can tell you observations. I can point things out.

At the end of the day, it's got to hit home to your heart or else you're not going to have a mind renewed. Your mind, God's trying to renew it and show you something and you're not seeing it. And then you're not being pleasing in the sacrifice.

And God's got to make it hit home. In the heart. You've got to see it.

And you know what? I think also this shows something about Paul. We tend to think people do not desire to accurately perceive themselves, but they always want to think highly of themselves. Paul doesn't view Christians in that way.

Paul doesn't view us as a bunch of conceited people running around who just want to think highly of ourselves. So why would you tell people who tend to think more highly of themselves than they ought? Well, I think that's Paul's point. He doesn't have that defeated view of believers.

We know that from Romans 6. Brethren, don't you just want to be a team player in the church? And I thought to illustrate it like this. When I was a kid, and we played different sports, let's think of football, not soccer, but American football. When you're in the Pee Wees, you want to be all manner of positions.

Well, I want to be a quarterback. I want to be a linebacker. I want to do this.

I want to do that. Do the people in the NFL, when you turn on the news, do you hear the quarterback is just frustrated and wanting to go be a linebacker? And the punter is wanting to be this, and the wide receiver wants to be the center? Have you ever heard that? In that sport, I've not. I've heard people want more time in the game.

But here's the point. Over time, and they developed, and through the years, it just became evident that brother's a cornerback. That brother's a wide receiver.

That person's a quarterback. Yeah, they might have different measures of using it, but it became evident how God had designed them. And if a bunch of not all lost or saved Christian football players, but if a league full of a lot of carnal people wanting to win an earthly trophy would be able to recognize how God has designed them and to latch on together to go and win a championship and an earthly crown that's

going to fade, how much more should we as Christians be willing to band together, to not think highly of ourselves, to have an accurate self-perception of ourselves, and to operate within the measure of confidence and faith that God has given us to use our gifts? Well, that's it.

I have one more page here. Brethren, pride and jealousy, they're destructive. Overwork and burnout are destructive.

Don't miss that, please. That's one of my main burdens in this. And remember, any gift you and I have is evidence of the graciousness of God to supply the church with the means to strengthen this community.

And if you realize this, it can save you from a lot of wrong attitudes towards other believers. And brethren, pride often struggles to embrace what God's design and assignment is for our lives. And I'm not saying that in my own life, that couldn't be true of even me.

You understand. What if I'm struggling in pride to do whatever God's assignment is? What if I'm using a certain measure? What if I'm going beyond this measure of faith that God has given? It's just for every one of us to think about. Let's pray.

Father, Lord, help us to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought, but to think with a sober judgment. Lord, each according to the measure of faith that You have assigned. Lord, what a thing.

Lord, we have assignments. And sometimes we feel like why isn't it as easy as a job? We get there and the boss, he hands us the sheet and says, this is your assignment for the day. Lord, we'd like it to be that easy for You to just tell us certain things that are true about ourselves.

And here You tell Paul to have these believers renew their minds? After giving them 11 chapters of solid, incredible doctrine and truth. Lord, help us to be free of any pride. Lord, I pray You'd help any brethren here who need to be stirred up to use a gift You've given them.

Lord, I pray You'd help them to do that very thing. And Lord, even as we go in the future to look at some of these gifts and to find them. And Lord, I also pray for those who are going beyond the measure of faith.

Lord, they're doing something, not in the proportion of confidence that You've given them to exercise as a gift. Lord, I pray they would be here today and see the freeness that they can sit down and stop overworking and that it's not sin, but it's actually sinning by overworking. Lord, we want to be like Mary.

She did the one thing that was necessary while her sister Martha was anxious and troubled about many things. Lord, help us to find in our own lives the right balance between the two. Lord, we look to You to do that, to work in us.

Lord, You worked in Paul. Work in us even today for Thine glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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