



Introduction

Last week our memorization and devotion brought us to the end of a section that mainly dealt with a Godly grace filled perspective. Paul laid a foundation for us as Christians concerning God's grace (v.1) worshipping Him (v.1), our relationship to the world (v. 2), our thoughts about ourselves (v.3), our attitude about others (v. 4-5), and our approach concerning our gifts and talents (v.6a).

Not forgetting that perspective, we want to move ahead into a new part which actually begins a section of lists that are vital for Christian living. As Christians living under the covenant of grace, we tend to shy away from lists of "things to do" to please God. While that is generally a good approach, in Romans 12 we do see some very direct lists and instructions though as Paul talks about living a victorious Christian life. So how do we mesh grace and lists together? It may seem like trying to attach jell-o to pudding, kind of difficult! While we can't attach those two substances, Paul does show us how to mesh grace and instruction lists together. The answer lies simply in not forgetting the beginning of the chapter as we look at the rest of it. The following could be a simple everyday language outline of Romans 12. As we memorize, I believe it is important for us to grasp how the chapter is divided, so I hope this simple description will help you.

- I. Open your eyes wide to God's Grace and don't ever forget it! View everything from a perspective of grace!
- II. Take ownership of God's perspective about worship, the world, yourself, others, and your gifts!
- III. Follow these instructions if you want to express Christian living in your day to day life!

So we have grace and perspective and now the lists and instructions begin. I want to encourage us to be very careful as we memorize and internalize these lists and instructions. We must view them in connection with the perspective of God's mercy toward us and the mindset of these first 4 verses. If we do that, we can truly get a grasp on God's heart. If we look at these lists apart from the perspectives of verses 1-5 we will miss God's point and likely get into checking off a list of duties in an effort to know God. That never works. Grace and God's perspective come first. Now let's get started on the instruction lists!

Looking at the Verses

Although our memory focus this week is verses 7-8, we are actually going to discuss the second half of verse 6b along with them because verse 6b is where the instruction lists begin. Look at these different translations of verses 6b-8 of Romans 12:

If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 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. (NIV)

The person who has the gift of prophecy should use that gift in agreement with the faith. Any one who has the gift of serving should serve. Anyone who has the gift of teaching should teach. Whoever has the gift of encouraging others should encourage. Whoever has the gift of giving to others should give freely. Anyone who has the gift of being a leader should try hard when he leads. Whoever has the gift of showing mercy to others should do so with joy. (NCV)

So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. (NLT)

If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face. (Message)

Each of these versions is expressing the same thing but I do love to see the different ways of communicating it. The Message translation is particularly interesting to me in these verses. I can just hear Paul speaking to our generation in this way. Whatever the translation is however, I believe the main point is easy to see. So what is the point? **Whatever you do, do it well!**

That may seem all too simple and yet as we understand the human race we know it needs to be said. Our human nature isn't always interested in excellence, especially in areas of service. Many times we just want to know that we did something, to be able to check off our list. We have already discussed that approach and it isn't the one we want to take! Instead we want to respond to the body of Christ in reflection of the lavish grace that we have been given (remember we have to look at the instruction lists in connection with the first part of the chapter). God didn't skimp on His service of grace toward us; we should follow His example and serve with excellence.

Let's talk about excellence for a moment. Excellence does not just involve the finished product, but it also involves the process. That is why I like the Message translation here. I think it speaks to our culture which can be so selfish. As Christians we can fall right into that too. Look back to the Message translation of these verses and read it again. What it describes is a servant being in the process of using his gift and then getting sidetracked by selfishness. So often where our selfishness shows up is the manner in which we treat people in the process of finishing the product. Selfishness is the pattern of the world (sounds like verse 2!) Instead, Paul encourages us here to know what our gift is and then proceed to use it with excellence. We can't allow ourselves to get sidetracked by selfishness, we have to use our gift in the very best way possible, in a way that reflects Christ's service to us. Christ not only presented us the product of salvation, the most excellent gift ever, He also treated us with service and humility in the process. We need to follow His example as we use our gifts, excellence in process and product!

Earlier, in verse 6, Paul made it clear that we all have a gift. He goes on in verses 6b-8 to describe some common gifts in the church: preaching or prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving and showing mercy. As he describes them, he instructs us how to use them. I believe this list of gifts isn't an exhaustive list; it could include much more. It appears that Paul is just giving a sample list of gifts in the church. Maybe you don't see your gift represented in that list. If you don't, keeping in the same spirit of using your gift well, how could you fill in the blanks with your gift and a description of excellent service?

If it is _____, then _____.

How wonderful it would be to really experience this kind of living in the body of Christ. I believe we can! When we know our own gift and we are motivated by grace to use it with excellence great things can happen. We can see great results, we can represent Christ's true nature, we can be kept from criticizing others gifts or being jealous of them and we can see the glory of God manifest itself in Christ's body here on earth. These verses are a clear call to excellence in the body of Christ!

And So...

How are you using your gift? Do you know what your gift or gifts are? Paul is calling us to use our gifts with excellence. I always marvel at the gifts God brings out in people's lives. So often I find the gifts He uses in the greatest ways are gifts we have to step out in faith to receive. For me personally, becoming a teacher of God's Word was not something that came naturally to me, but I knew God was calling me to step out in faith and put this gift into action, believing it was His gift to me. I have been amazed to see how He has developed it. It has been a step of faith in so many ways for me to allow Him to do so, but I am determined to use this gift in light of His grace and with excellence. And...I am so thankful for the many I have watched along the way who are serving with excellence, what an example!

Consider:

What is your gift?

Are you serving with excellence?

What holds you back or can sometimes get you sidetracked in selfishness?

What is one way that you could increase the quality of your service?

Pray

"Lord you have given me a gift. Help me to serve with excellence!"

* To read past devotions or for more info about Established Footsteps, visit www.EstablishedFootsteps.com.