

Things that don't fit make us feel uncomfortable, like trousers that have become too tight or a crude remark that is out of place in polite company.

As we mature and become responsible we develop a sense of what is out of place and doesn't fit.

When people quit their job they may explain, *'It just wasn't a good fit.'*

Speaking of her breakup with a boyfriend a woman said, *'I was looking for someone a little closer to the top of the food chain.'* Obviously, it hadn't been a good fit, or an amicable parting.

God did not create people according to a one-size-fits-all model.

In a particular social setting some people may be exhilarated while others are bored out of their gourds.

- That's the way it is in the church too. Every true Christian is part of Christ's Church, and each of us fits into the church in a unique way.

One of the clearest biblical descriptions of the church is the metaphor of a living body with its multiple interdependent parts working in a healthy organic union.

The Apostle Paul explained that this church body *"grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work."* (Ephesians 4:16)

There is a "right fit" for every Christian without exception in a healthy church. This right fit for each of us is based on the way God's grace has shaped each of us uniquely.

These works of God's grace in our lives are called grace gifts, or spiritual gifts. They outfit each of us to serve our Lord in exactly the way he wants us to fit in.

- Let us take a look at how the Apostle Paul explains this in his letter to the Roman Christians:

<sup>1</sup> *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.*

<sup>2</sup> *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

<sup>3</sup> *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 measure of faith God has given you.*

<sup>4</sup> *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.*

<sup>6</sup> *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.*

This portion of God's Word explains what is required of each of us to fit in and function properly as a part of Christ's church.

### **I. A TOTAL COMMITMENT TO GOD. Romans 12:1-2**

This is how we respond to God's mercy. We commit ourselves to God.

<sup>1</sup> *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Paul's Letter to the Romans is about having a right relationship with God by faith alone. Any person can be right with God by accepting God's amazing gift of mercy in Christ.

- Earlier in this letter Paul asked the rhetorical question whether someone who has received God's gift of mercy can just carry on living as if nothing has changed.

Such a notion was abhorrent to him. *'What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?'* (Romans 6:1-2)

- There is nothing more important in your life than how you respond to God.

If you have surrendered your life to God in response to his gift of mercy to you through Christ, make sure it's evident in the way you live.

- Paul used terminology from the practice of making an offering or sacrifice to God.

He said *'offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.'*

- What sort of animal did people in Old Testament offer as a sacrifice to God?

Was it a sick, mangy lamb or bull on its last legs that soon would die anyway?

God gave stern a warning about doing that sort of thing. *'When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the Lord to fulfill a special vow or as a freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable. Do not offer to the Lord the blind, the injured or the maimed, or anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these on the altar as an offering made to the Lord by fire.'* (Leviticus 22:21-22)

God doesn't accept an offering that is defiled and infected with sin.

That's what we all were before we received God's mercy—spiritually mangy and disease-riddled.

- In this letter Paul explained how people become clean, righteous, and acceptable to our holy God. By God's mercy we are made acceptable to God.

Now we are eligible to offer ourselves totally to God.

The term *'your spiritual act of worship'* in v.1 can be understood as *'your reasonable service.'*

It's important that the truth Paul explains here not be lost in translation. It means that in view of God's mercy or compassion, this sincere offering of ourselves to God is the only kind that is appropriate.

- How do we make this offering to God? By the way we live in our present mortal bodies.

<sup>2</sup> *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

We have not become acceptable in God's sight just so that we can conform to the spirit of the age and live approximately the way we used to before we were transformed by God's grace.

- If Christians fit into the pattern of the secular culture, the church won't be significantly different from the corrupt surrounding society.

Yehoshafat Harkabi, a professor of international relations at Hebrew University in Jerusalem once said, *'Israel cannot defend itself if half its population is the enemy.'* (TIME, 4/4/88)

There's no way a church can be alive and healthy if half its people are in bondage the values of a decadent society.

- So Paul says in v.2 *'... be transformed, . . . then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is.'*

The phrase, *test and approve* means that after you have examined something, you place a value on it.

It's like the Antiques Road Show on television. People bring in some of the clutter from their attic or their collectables. An expert examines the items and places a value on them.

If you have been transformed by God's mercy at the center of your being, then you place the right value on God's will—you delight in it.

- When by God's mercy through Jesus Christ we come into a right relationship with God, we still struggle with this world we have to live in physically.

The old impulses in us that used to yield so easily to the allurements of sin don't just suddenly vanish.

- But God's word says it's right and proper to expect Christians to be committed to God instead of conformed to the pattern and values of this age. We have been transformed, and we belong to God.

## **II. AN HONEST ASSESSMENT OF YOURSELF. Romans 12:3**

The Apostle Paul was concerned about Christians having inflated opinions of themselves, as if they had attained righteousness before God by their own efforts instead of through God's mercy.

<sup>3</sup> *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 measure of faith God has given you.*

What is the standard by which we measure ourselves as Christians?

Paul says faith is the most important measure in your assessment of yourself.

Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ alone as your Savior? If you have, you stand on exactly the same level as all other Christians.

But if you think you have done enough good in your own ability to merit God's favor, then you know squat about genuine faith. That's the blunt truth.

- In a healthy church body nobody is more important than anyone else.

We depend on each other, and we need each other.

The Bible is clear that Christians are connected to one another in a vital community called the church.

In his Journal John Wesley tells about some wise counsel a man once gave him. The man said, *'Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Remember that you cannot serve him alone. You must therefore find companions, or make them. The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.'*

- On October 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>—two Monday evenings at 6:30 we're offering what we call On-Ramp membership classes. If you are ready to bring your connection to Christ Jesus full circle by becoming a member of

Crossroads Church, please plan to attend. If you're not sure and want to learn more, I invite you to attend as well. Sign up on the blue Welcome Card in your bulletin.

### III. A VITAL ATTACHMENT TO OTHERS. Romans 12:4-8

Let's take a look at what it means to be connected to the church, the body of which Jesus Christ is the Head. The apostle Paul told the Corinthian church, *'Now you (plural) are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.'* (1 Corinthians 12:27)

As a living part of the spiritual body of Christ, the church, you fit into the body in a unique way designed by God.

<sup>4</sup> *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.*

Any Christian who conforms to the pattern of the world and embraces the secular culture's values will be a spiritual misfit in the church.

That may not sound like a nice thing to say, but it is the truth.

Spiritual misfits make the body of Christ sick.

They attend the church physically, but they don't belong spiritually.

I'm not talking about sincere Christians who struggle with sin and often fail. They belong. They fit into the church.

If we have received God's mercy and new life by faith in Christ, then we fit into the body of Christ.

Each of us has a particular function, and we need each other.

<sup>6</sup> *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;*

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The apostle Peter wrote, *'Each one should use whatever spiritual gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's gifts in its various forms.'* (1 Peter 4:10)

Paul gives us a sampling of these spiritual gifts here.

- Prophecy. This means "forth-telling" and not necessarily "foretelling."

The grace gift of Prophecy today means declaring what God's Word is saying to his people in a particular context today. It has little, if anything, to do with predicting what will happen in the future.

The distinctive message of the Old Testament prophets included the bold statement "Thus says the Lord." They were God's spokespersons to a specific situation.

We should pray that God will use the pastors of this church in this way—and other teachers too. When they preach and teach from God's word that the Holy Spirit moves them to say with confidence, *This is what God is saying to us as his church.*

Indispensable though correct theology be, prophecy is crucial because it specifically applies God's truth for a church in its current situation.

- Teaching is an organized instruction in the truths of the Bible.
- Exhortation or encouragement is the Greek word *parakalón*. It means coming alongside people who need to be comforted or confronted by God's word.
- Giving to the needs of others means sharing with those in need from the abundance that God has entrusted to you.

If we're not trapped by the greedy standards of the world and we don't think of ourselves more highly than we ought, then we will be generous.

- Leadership here is probably quite different from what you might expect it to mean.

The key leadership roles in the New Testament are "overseer" and "elder" and "shepherd" or "pastor."

It seems that Paul clustered the gifts in our text in such a way that they are closely related to one another. So this gift of leadership may denote those who administer the moneys that are generously given to the church to care for those who have needs. (See Cranfield, *ICC on Romans*, Vol. 2. pp. 625-27)

- Showing mercy is, as I have just mentioned, closely tied in with leading.

Every genuine Christian has an important function in the spiritual body of Christ, the church.

- Some of you may be wondering, *'Exactly how do I get involved? What in particular should I do in the church?'*

Let's be sure we all understand that God didn't give us a spiritual shopping list so that you can choose the gift you would like to have.

The Lord who made you and redeemed you knows best how you fit into his body, the church.

- One of the core courses taught here at Crossroads is called SHAPE. Pastor Bill usually teaches it. You learn how God has shaped you uniquely to fit into his church and into his plans for your life.

There's a card in your Bulletin to help you fit in where you can flourish. Please use it to let us know where you sense you would be a good fit.

- The chief thing I want to stress is that whatever you do, it's supposed to be in a harmonious relationship with your fellow Christians in the church.

Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961) was to appear as guest conductor with an orchestra lacking in discipline. At the first rehearsal, he was going over the score with the musicians. The concertmaster indicated a certain passage and asked: *'How would you like us to play this, Sir Thomas?'* *'Together,'* Beecham suggested.

When the Christians in a church are in right relationship with God and in harmony with each other, the church produces something beautiful for God. .

The purpose of Crossroads Church is to prayerfully introduce people to Jesus, grow them to be like Jesus, care for others, minister to others, and to glorify God.

For this to happen it's essential that we become connected to one another as the church, the body of Christ.

- Let's not forget what this requires of each of us:
  1. Nothing less than *a total commitment to God*, as the right response to his mercy.
  2. *An honest assessment of ourselves*. That means being real with ourselves and with others—no pretense.
  3. *A vital attachment to others*. We belong to each other in interdependent relationships that are essential to the health and effectiveness of the church.