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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: One Body, One Church

Transcribed Message
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Romans 12:4-5

Mark Dever is a pastor in Washington DC of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, which is literally just within walking distance of the United States Capital. He has written a lot of things but one of the books that he's written is called *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. He lists out the nine marks of a healthy church: expositional preaching, Biblical theology, the gospel, conversion, evangelism, church membership, church discipline, Biblical leadership. Nine things that he believes are crucial to a healthy church and I think we would probably all agree and say yeah, we can see value in every one of those. If I could add one more and make it 10, I think I would add to it how is it that the church functions as the diverse body of Christ that God has called us to be. How is it that we function in a healthy manner in using the gifts and capacities that God has given to us to advance this gospel and to bring this charge of discipleship that God has given to us? So we take that thought from Mark Dever's book with our one additional chapter and we turn again to Romans 12 this morning. That's exactly what we see Paul moving into in Romans 12 verses 4 and 5. We want to see that a healthy church, this healthy body that God has called us to be a part of, depends on each and every individual member and part functioning according to God's design. If that's going to happen, then obviously everybody is needed.

Let's do a quick four-word review of the first three verses of Romans. Four words to capture what we've already looked at to this point. The first one is the word "surrendered". We have surrendered to God. Verse 1 – present yourself as a living sacrifice. Having done that is just another way of saying we have surrendered ourselves fully and completely to God. After that opening verse and after that active surrender in presenting your body as a living sacrifice, then everything else in Romans 12 falls into place. It all starts with that idea of surrender of verse 1. We understand that that's not

something that we can do of our own strength and energy. It's a work of God in our lives.

The second word is the word "separated". We're separated from the world. Don't be conformed to the world. We're nonconformists. We're not nonconformist just to be nonconformists. We're not nonconformist just so we're different and we stand out and we're distinct just for the sake of being a nonconformist. No, we're nonconformists because we understand and we believe that you can't be a friend of God and a friend of the world at the same time. We have made our choice and we have cast our lot with God. James make it very clear you can't live with one foot in each world and be a fully devoted follower of Christ. You can try but it will not work. You and I have to choose and we choose every day. Are we going to be nonconformists? Are we going to be a friend of God? Or, are we going to sell out and be a friend of the world?

Thirdly is the word "transformed". We're transformed in our mind. The word of God by virtue of being the word of God and the word of God by inviting it into our lives we hear the word. That's the easiest of all the things that we can do. We hear the word. We read the word. That takes a little bit more. We study the word. That causes us to dive a little bit deeper. We memorize the word. It takes a little more discipline. We meditate on the word that we've memorized. You see you've got a handle with those five things on this transforming word of God. I can say to you this morning without any equivocation if you're not hearing the word, if you're not reading the word, if you're not studying the word, if you're not memorizing the word, if you're not meditating on the word, your mind is not being transformed. It is being shaped by something, but it is not being transformed in the way that God wants it to be transformed. We need to have our mind renewed by the word of God.

Last week we looked at this last one. This evidence of a renewed mind. I just think again as we talked about last week it's so interesting to me that the very first thing that Paul points to to show that we've got a renewed mind is we have a sober understanding of who we are. We have a sober evaluation of how we see ourselves. That was verse 3. In a simple word, it is humility. We walk before God and before each other in a spirit of humility. Paul said don't think of yourself too high. Don't overthink was the literal word he used. Don't overthink. But the opposite is to underthink and he said

don't do that either. I think the key is to stay near to the cross. As you stay near to the cross you have a much greater sense of who God is and who you are. So, we approach all that he is going to bring to us now in these coming verses with the spirit of humility. Our mind being renewed and transformed. This sense of we aren't aligning ourselves with the world but we're surrendering ourselves to God.

What's next up? What's next up is thinking right about spiritual gifts. We're going to spend this morning and Lord willing next Sunday looking at verses 4 through 8 in this matter of spiritual gifts. Let's start off so we're all on the same page together and make some introductory comments about this matter of spiritual gifts. Let's start off by looking at the definition of spiritual gifts.

There are all kinds of ways I suppose that we can define this matter of a spiritual gift, but this is I think a very simple straightforward definition. A spiritual gift is a God-given ability. It is something that God has given to us. We're not talking about natural talent. We're not talking about a natural gift per se. God may use your spiritual gifts in conjunction with your natural abilities and talents, but this is something that God has given. This is a God-given ability, and it is that ability that allows you to serve with ease. I didn't say easy; I said to serve with ease and with effectiveness and also enjoyment. All of those go together. It's a God-given ability and allows us to serve and to serve in such a way that we do it with ease, effectiveness, and enjoyment. When you're using your spiritual gift, it is something that you enjoy. You enjoy doing what it is that God has blessed you with by way of that gift. You enjoy it and other people see you enjoy it. That is one of the affirmations of what our spiritual gifts are. People see us serving and doing something and they say you seem to be enjoying what you're doing. You do that with effectiveness. You do that with a sense of ease. I think that's a part of that process.

Look secondly at how are they described. If you look at the spiritual gifts, you can divide naturally into three different categories. There are speaking gifts. There are serving gifts, which in a sense obviously covers all of them, but also sign gifts. If you look at the list of gifts that we have in the New Testament, here we are in Romans 12. You can go to 1 Corinthians 12 or Ephesians 4 or 1 Peter four. You have two twelves: Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. You have two fours: Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter four. Next time somebody says to you something about spiritual gifts, then you say oh you

mean what Paul wrote about in Romans 12, in 1 Corinthians 12, in Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4? They'll say you know your Bible and then you repent of the sin of pride. No, it's really easy though. We have four lists of spiritual gifts. You look at those four lists and depending on how you understand these different words that are used, there are between 18 and 20 or 21 different gifts that are listed in these four different passages. Then you look at that and you see you can put every one of these words, and maybe we'll look at that next Sunday, into one of these categories of the idea of speaking, serving, and sign gifts.

Then notice thirdly. Where are they used? As I thought about that, I almost wanted to add the word "how". How are they used? Where are they used? They're used in the church and they're used for God's glory. I don't mean that a spiritual gift has to be used in the church physically in a building, but they're used in the church and they're used for the glory of God. Every time we read about spiritual gifts it has to do with the health of the body and the building up of the body and the edifying of the body. Even the gift of evangelism, of bringing the gospel to people, is adding to the body. The spiritual gifts always have that in view. How it is that they're being utilized? Where are they being utilized?

Let's look again at verses 4 and 5: "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 body in Christ and individually members of one another." So here is one of Paul's favorite analogies. It's the analogy he'll use in 1 Corinthians 12 and the same one that he'll speak of in Ephesians 4 as he does here in Romans 12. It's an analogy that helps us relate very easily to the concepts that he wants to see here. It's also a very powerful analogy that speaks of a spiritual and yet at the same time a very practical reality.

Notice the beginning of verse 4 is another connective word. The word "for". For as in one body. He's connecting it back again to what he had just said. It's almost like he says in verse 3 you need an attitude and a spirit of humility. You need to have a proper understanding and evaluation of yourself before God, because when you come now to verse 4 he's going to walk us into the subject of spiritual gifts. It's vital and important that we have a proper understanding of ourselves and we approach this whole thing with the spirit of humility.

Remember when Paul wrote the book of Romans he's writing from the city of Corinth. Remember in the city of Corinth, he gives a whole section of the book to this matter of spiritual gifts. One of the clear, glaring deficiencies of the church in Corinth was a spirit of pride in the exercise and use of spiritual gifts. Rightly now as he comes to this in Romans 12, he says let me remind you to just peek back at verse 3. We just talked about the need for humility. Why walk in humility? Because you need to walk in humility as you understand how it is that God has gifted you for this reason.

The American Association of Anatomists, the people who study the human body, tell us that there are 7500 different named parts to our body. 7500+. That's one of the reasons why I'm not your doctor. I'm your pastor. About 7000 of those reasons I don't think I could remember. 7500+ parts to our body are named. We have dozens of organs. Over 200 different bones in our body. Our bodies are an amazing masterpiece of God's creation. When Paul steps into this spiritual reality of the body of Christ, he loves to bring us this picture of our physical body. This is the analogy that he uses here. As he does that, I want you to see that the church is the body of Christ. That's the point that he is making. The church is the body of Christ. This body that he is talking about is pictured in the church in this spiritual analogy. There is a spiritual reality. There is a spiritual vitality to this imagery that he is using, and it is one that is real and one that we can relate to and one that he is going to show us what this looks like. The church is the body of Christ.

When Paul speaks of the church as the body of Christ, there's two different ways that we can think of this imagery and this picture. The first is what we call the universal church. The universal church. The universal church is the body of believers all around the world. It isn't just the body of believers all around the world. It's the body of believers from the beginning of the church at Pentecost all the way to our present-day. So down through these hundreds of centuries, every person who has believed and put their faith and trust in Christ is a part of this universal body of Christ. Here we are on Sunday morning, November 20th, and already all around the world believers have gathered just like we are. They're a part of this body, this universal body of Christ. We share that with them even though we may never meet any of these people this side of glory. They're a part of this spiritual body. They're a part of this analogy that Paul is giving to us here.

There is that sense of what he's talking about here – all of these believers down through all of these ages.

Then the second way of course that we use this word is the church that is local. That's us right now this morning at Covenant Community Church. Here we are. We share in this picture. We're a part of this body of believers. Paul, as he begins almost all of his letters, says something by way of a greeting to the Saints in Corinth. He is talking about that local assembly of believers. If he wrote a letter to us, he would say to the believers who meet in Yukon, Oklahoma at Covenant Community Church. He is talking about that local fellowship and so we have that idea here.

Notice two times in verses 4 and 5 Paul says we. Verse 4. As in one body we have many members. Verse 5. So we have many members. We have many members, he says, and we are one body. He's linking himself with those believers in Rome as if he was one with them and he is – not locally with them, but in the sense of being one with them in this universal body of Christ. Here's the point. How does the church function? How is it that then we are to function as the body of Christ?

Two truths come out of these two verses that we want look at this morning. The first one in verse 4 is that in the body there's diversity. In the body there is diversity. Look at verse 4 again. "For as in one body we have many members and the members do not all have the same function." So you look at that 4th verse and one of the first observations that you make is that we are not all alike. That is what Paul says. For we as one body have many members. There's a great variety in the body of Christ. It's part of God's creative purpose, a part of this creative design is that there would be diversity. We literally in this room this morning come from different countries. We come with different backgrounds. We come with different languages. We come with different perspectives. We come with different outlooks on life and different experiences. It's vast and broad and wide. There is great diversity in the body of Christ. God didn't cut us all out of the same cloth.

Aren't you glad for that? Aren't you glad that in the body that there is this unity of diversity so that we're all unique and different? There isn't any two of us that have had the same life experiences, that see things just exactly the same. He clearly wants us to understand this matter of diversity in that we're not all alike. I like the way Michael

Horton put it. He said, "The church is not a group of friends you've picked. It's a group of brothers and sisters that God has picked for you." It isn't just people that you've picked and are gravitating towards. No, it's God has picked all kinds of people. If we pick ourselves, what do we do? We find people who are just like us. We find people who think like us. We find people who act like us. The whole point that Paul is making is we are one body but we have many members. There's diversity purposefully.

In the 1st century as Paul writes to the church at Rome, they were struggling big time with how it is that Jews and Gentiles can be one united body of believers together. It was hard. There were centuries of mistrust and hatred, not unlike the world that we live in today. But it wasn't even just on the ethnicity issue. It was also, Paul says in Galatians 3, with regard to the fact that God was bringing together in the church this diversity of people, some of whom were bond and some who were free. It doesn't take too much to realize there are male and female. Paul says in Galatians there are men and there are women. He's not trying to wipe out the categories. That's foolish.

There are those categories. There are Jews. There are Greeks. There are bond. There are free. There are male. There are female. But he is saying you overcome those because of what God is doing in the diversity he wants us to see. So too today. We have within the church God bringing together people from every tongue, tribe, and nation. That's what that great gathering and revelation around the throne is going to be. From every tribe, from every tongue, from every nation.

Even in our local church right here we have people who come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Some of you came out of homes where there wasn't a lot. There was a lot of hardship financially in your background. Some of you were just on the opposite end of that. You came from homes and families where you always had everything that you needed. Some of you are white collar. Some of you are blue-collar. Some of you have a greater educational experience. Some of you less so. Just go down the list and you have all of these different ways. We even have bedlam here. We have people who love OU. Maybe I shouldn't go there. We have people who love OSU. We've even allowed a few Huskers to come in among us. All of that to say, there's great diversity in the body of Christ and that is how God designed it to be.

Now we go on to see that we're not all given the same spiritual gifts. We're not all given the same gifts. He says we don't have the same function. Just peek ahead to verse 5 where he's going to step into this matter. Again, that's good. Every member of the body of Christ has a distinct function. God doesn't design us so that we do and act exactly like somebody else. We're unique in that sense. It would be ridiculous and it would be grotesque to envision a human body that was just of one part. It would gross you out if I was standing up this morning and I was one giant eyeball. You'd close your eyes because you wouldn't want to look at that. Wait a minute. Some of you have your eyes closed right now. What if I was just one big mouth? Be very careful how you respond to that illustration. Just think of what he's saying here. It wouldn't be good. It wouldn't be healthy. It wouldn't be productive. That's why God has given us this diversity. That's why everybody doesn't have the same gifts and abilities. No one can do everything themselves. The body is designed and required to function as God has designed it with everybody making a contribution, everybody having a part.

What is a healthy local church body? It is when everybody is discovering and using their spiritual gifts and contributing to the health of the body. I'm pretty sure if we could get 15 or 20 or 30 pastors together and ask them what is it that you would want for your people to know. There's a lot of things obviously we would want them to know. But one of the important things that you would want them to know that would impact the health of your church, I can assure you that in that list in the top five would be something along the lines of I would love for my church and my people to realize that God has gifted them in such a way that is unique and special and He wants them to use that gifting to enhance the ministry that God has given to us as a local church. That is clearly what Paul has in mind here. That is so important.

And yet here is the sad reality. The sad reality is that some of you don't even know that you have a spiritual gift. Some of you don't know right now if you were asked to stand and say what your spiritual gift is, you wouldn't know what to say. Some of you know what your spiritual gift is but you're simply choosing to not use it and to involve yourself in the furtherance of the health of the body. That gift is being wasted. We'll step into some more of that, Lord willing, next Sunday.

Look at then the next thing that Paul points to. We're not all given the same gifts, but in the body there is unity. Verse 5. "So we though many are one body in Christ and individually members one of another." We all have something in common and he says we all have a common faith in Jesus Christ. That is the one thing that we all have in common. Our unity is organic. It's not simply organizational. There is organizational unity. For a group of people to function, there has to be organization, doesn't there? But that's not what he is talking about here. He's talking about an organic unity. He's talking about a vital, spiritual, and visible unity that we have in common in Christ Jesus.

In Ephesians 4, Paul does almost a mirror of what he does in Romans. Remember we've talked about Romans 1 through 11 all of this doctrine, all of this laying the groundwork. Then 12 to 16 he gets into all the practical stuff. He does the exact same thing in Ephesians 1 through 3. He lays out all of this doctrine in the first three chapters. He gets to chapter 4 and he says be sure to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. How do you do that? He says it's pretty simple because we have one body, one spirit, one hope, one faith, one baptism, and one Lord. That's what he is doing. He is saying look at this. There is this common faith that we have in Jesus Christ. It's the very thing that Jesus prayed for in John 17. Father, I pray that My people as they come together in the church will experience the unity that You and I have. That was the prayer of our Lord. That's the very thing that Paul is speaking here when he says this common faith that we have in Jesus Christ. That is the center of how it is that while there is diversity among us there could still be unity.

Notice that phrase that Paul uses: so we though many are one body in Christ. One of Paul's favorite expressions. You read the Pauline epistles and underline every time you come across that phrase "in Christ". It appears many, many times. It is a unity that has been created and brought about by our faith in Christ and it bonds us together. Each of us is in a relationship with Christ. If we've responded to the gospel of God's grace, if we've put our faith and trust in Christ, then we are in fact in a relationship with Christ. By virtue of that relationship with Christ, we are then in a relationship with each other. If I am in Christ, then Christ is my brother. If you are in Christ, you are then my brother or my sister. That's the whole point of what he's saying here. This unity that we have is because of what Christ has done for all of us. We share in that then we can

receive everything that Christ wants us to have. Ephesians 1. When Paul says that He has bestowed upon us and He has given to us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Isn't that amazing? Christ can share with us everything that He wants us to have as brothers and sisters in Christ. We experience this all together as one body.

Now then, notice lastly we're all interconnected. We're all interconnected and individually members of one another. Look at that phrase again. He could have said we're individually members of Christ. Instead he said we're individually members of one another. Why do you suppose he did that? Isn't it saying the same thing? If we say we are members individually of Christ, isn't that the same as saying we're members of one another? Yes, it is. It is the same. But what's the point? His point is how is it that we are connected to each other? We're connected to each other because of our union in Christ. How do we tangibly show to the world that we're members of one another? By underscoring this matter of our unity and oneness in Christ. By emphasizing the fact that we belong to each other. That's what he is doing. Very practical point.

Yes, we're members each in Christ, but it gives a weightiness to it, it gives a practical expression of it when he says we belong to one another. We don't live in isolation. We live connected. We don't come to church to watch a performance. We don't come to church to listen to a lecture. We don't come to church and come late and leave early. All of those things defy the very point that he's making here. The point he is making is we belong. There is an interconnectedness. When we come as a consumer, we're defying this very matter of belonging. If all we are doing is coming to see a performance or listen to a lecture, there's no sense of belonging.

I would say to you that one of the main problems of the church in America today is we have an underdeveloped ecclesiology. No, that's not one of the 7500 parts of your body. Ecclesiology is the doctrine of the church. We have an underdeveloped doctrine of the church. Last week we talked about the fact that we live in a very narcissistic culture and society. Do you know what feeds that narcissism? The other issue that is very American – our sense of independence, our sense of autonomy, our sense of “I don't need anybody”, our sense of “I can come on a Sunday, get what I want, leave and pretend in my understanding of the doctrine of the church that somehow that's how it's supposed to be”. No, that isn't how it's supposed to be. There is a sense of

connectedness, interconnectedness. There is a vital sense of belonging. It isn't enough to just come and consume. We are to come and to share. We're to come and to seek out. We're to come and to interact. We're to come and connect. We're to come and belong. That's the whole point of what Paul is doing as he launches in to this 12th chapter of all of this practical stuff.

Again, I say to you I'm just amazed that as Paul starts this 12th chapter and all of these practical things that he is going to be stepping into that he begins by saying to me and to you strive for an attitude and heart of humility. Then get yourself connected. Belong to this diverse and yet united group of believers. Find a place to belong. God sees the church as the body of Christ. To be a part of the body of Christ is not just a spiritual reality. It is a spiritual reality, of course, but it is a personal, relational, practical reality that requires each of us to take seriously this matter not just of diversity but of unity and to do our part. When we do that, God does something beautiful that we see and experience in the church. But you know what? It's something that's beautiful that the world sees as well as we function and live together in the way that God has called us to. My friends, the health of the body of Covenant Community Church depends on it. It depends on you knowing, discovering, using your gift and your abilities that God has given and entrusted to you for the enhancement of the body of Christ.

What do we take away? When you do what God has gifted you to do and you do it in the power of the Spirit, I say to you that Covenant Community Church will be a healthy growing body of believers. What are you waiting for? Get connected. Get involved. Discover and use your spiritual gift. Pick up one of those brochures in the foyer. Read through that this afternoon and ask God to show you where and how and what kind of a contribution He wants you to make in this church and in this community for the advancement of the gospel and the building up of the body of Christ.

Of course, for that to happen, you have to be in Christ. You have to have heard this glorious gospel. You have to have not only heard it, but you have to welcome it. You have to embrace it. You have to believe it. It is the gospel that says that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and that the wages of sin is death. But the gift of God, the gift of God's grace that He gives to us, is the forgiveness of sin as a result of what Jesus has done on the cross. If you believe that, if you believe that there

isn't anything that you can do to earn God's favor and gain entrance to heaven, and you believe that what Jesus did is all that needs to be done, God says He gives to you the gift of eternal life and you will live with Him forever.

Let's pray. Father God, we ask again for You by Your Spirit to do that mighty work in each of our lives. Apply Your word so that we go from here mindful of what You have called us to do and be. I pray again this morning if there's anyone listening who has not yet put their trust in Jesus as their Savior that they would lay aside whatever human effort and work that they are attempting to bring to You and that they would trust in what Jesus has done and in what Jesus has done alone for the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.