

Today I want to talk about “finding your place in church”, and what that’s **supposed** to mean.

To a lot of us, the very idea of “finding our place in church”, well we mightn’t call it that, but it’s very often based on “consumerism”... Just about everything else in society’s driven by consumerism – why would church be any different???

Do you know what I mean by that?

It’s when a service is provided, for me to consume. And all the different churches in town are providing a different level of service, and so I find the product that ‘best suits me’. And if **this** particular church is providing the product that **I** want, I feel like I’ve found my place – right on that pew there, taking it all in.

And very often, you’ll find the most popular churches, are the ones who have a number of staff, who will look after your every ministry need, and your family’s needs, and pastoral needs, and your worship needs...

But that’s not at all what “finding our place in church” is supposed to be about. And consumer Christianity might seem easy, but it’ll very often lead to a very shallow experience of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

*When I first moved to Dalby (to work at the Ag College), Robyn and I were engaged. And so we talked about what church I would become a member of, and she too would join it, once we were married and she’d made the move too.*

*And here’s the thing:*

*There were a few pretty big, alive and vibrant churches in Dalby. One of them, I’d had a past association with. 6 years earlier, I’d been a **student** at the Ag College that I was now coming to work at. And at **that** time, I used to go to the Presbyterian Church... And it would’ve been so easy, to slip back in there, with the people I already knew:*

- *I had good friends there*
- *It was alive;*
- *worship was vibrant;*
- *They had all sorts of Sunday school groups;*
- *kids clubs*
- *youth groups*
- *Young adult groups*
- *young mothers groups*

*Every service you could possibly hope for, was all there...*

*And I knew that I could just slip into that church, and for a few years, I could have church done to me.*

- *I could learn from the preacher – he seemed to be a good one*
- *I could enjoy the great music*
- *and I could do all that, with as little commitment as I liked.*

*I **could** have become, “a consumer of church” ...*

*Do you know what we did? We joined one of the smallest churches in town, partly because Robyn and I were both involved in running youth camps in that denomination, at a presbytery level, but **mainly** because we felt that’s where God was calling us. And I knew, from the moment I knocked on the minister’s door, and said “This is who we are”, and “I’m here”, and his wife invited me to stay for dinner,,,, And as we talked over dinner, I knew I had found a church, who would put us in the harness, to serve Christ as part of His body...*

*Little did we know, what journey the Lord was going to take that church on... It wasn't long until the minister (who was probably about the age I am now) dropped dead of a heart attack... And then, maybe about 6 or 7 years later, and 2 ministers later, that church began to pray, and it went through a bit of a revival... As the people in our church, found their place, in the church – a place where we weren't just consuming a product – we were serving our Lord.*

To find our place in the church, is about discovering “What part of the body **am** I?”

- and if I'm a hand, am I a functioning hand? Or am I a paralysed hand? ; and
- If I'm an eye, am I seeing stuff? And telling the rest of the body what I can see? ; or
- If I'm a leg, am I walking? Or does the rest of the body have to get pushed around in a wheel chair, because I'm not functioning as the leg that I'm supposed to be???

That's the metaphor, of the church being a body, and about us finding our place **in** the body.

And this being in the body, and functioning as part of the body, is very much an expression of our worship.

Last week, we learned about what true worship is. True worship – Spiritual worship – the worship that God is looking for, is for us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. And for this to be even possible, requires a complete transformation, to a new way of life. – No longer being conformed to the world, but being transformed – changed; renewed, to become more and more like Jesus. And it's a **radical** change – like metamorphosis from a grub to a

butterfly – that’s what it’s like to be changed, from our old way of life, to a life in the Spirit.

And I finished off last week, with a bit of a hint, of what we were coming to today. The fact that true worship – spiritual worship is about inner holiness and outward righteousness, does not mean that it’s something we do apart from the rest of the church.

Living together, as a bunch of Christians – being church together, is very much a part of this radical transformed life, which **is** our spiritual worship. ... You know, there’s a lot of people who claim to be Christians, and they say, “You don’t have to go to church to be a Christian.” “I can worship God at home.” “My transformed life, is my worship – I don’t need any church for that.” You probably know someone who thinks along those lines...

Well, let me tell you, they’re either living in denial, or they’re living in ignorance. Because part of this transformed, holy life, that is acceptable to God, is for us to come together. And for us together, to be His body, on this earth... That’s the way God’s designed it. It’s His will. And God has designed, that every single Christian be equipped with both natural, and spiritual gifts, and these gifts are to be used, for the building up of the whole church.

God’s designed that into you. **You** have been (and will be) equipped with both natural and spiritual gifts, and those gifts are to be used for the building up of the whole church.

And so this transformation – this renewal of the mind, is not only about “becoming a nicer, better person” – it’s also about “coming to a proper view of one’s self, in the body of Christ.”

How do you view **yourself** in the church? Do you see yourself as an essential body part? Or do you see yourself as a mole or an appendix – something that’s there, but you’re not really sure what it’s supposed to do. And the other parts of the body mightn’t even notice you, until you get angry or inflamed?

Do you have a proper view of yourself in the body of Christ?

Some have too **high** of a view of themselves. Others have too **low** of a view of themselves. And you can pretty much tell the difference for yourself. It’s a pretty easy self-assessment:

- If my attitude is “That church really needs me”, then I’m probably thinking more highly of myself than I ought.
- But if my attitude is “The church doesn’t need me”.  
“I’ve got nothing to offer.”, then I’ve got a faith problem

Every member, has essential gifts for the church. But no **one** member, is more important than anybody else.

*Unless you’ve been away for a few weeks, you’ve probably noticed this video camera that appeared 4 weeks ago. We’ve been asked to start videoing these messages, so that churches without ministers and home groups, can access these messages to get a bit of bible teaching. And a request like that, very quickly appeals to the pride of a preacher, but I did have some concerns. And my concern is that churches may begin to rely too heavily on a bible message that gets imported*

*into the church each week, and therefore get lax in using and developing their own gifts.*

*So, if you're listening to this, either on MP3 or if you're watching the video, I want you to know, that we as a church are very pleased that we can help you as you follow Christ and as you grow in Him... But my hope and my prayer, is that you would never neglect the gifts that God has given you, and placed in **your** church. Make sure you meet together with other Christians whenever you are able. Make it a priority. Encourage one another. Don't neglect the gifts that God has given you. Be the body of Christ where you are. And we pray that these messages might help you **in** that.*

*But I would be sooo disappointed, if the provision of these messages, either decreased your fellowship with other Christians, or decreased the exercising of **your** spiritual gifts.*

Now having said that, those of us here, can be just as much in danger, of neglecting **our** spiritual gifts.

**V<sup>3</sup>** 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 that God has assigned.

Alright, if we begin to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to, well that's pride, and self-importance. And there's no place for that sort of attitude in the church. But instead,

Paul tells us, to think with sober judgment. – that means “Take stock of the situation, and understand how it really is.”  
..., each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

This has got nothing to do with how we feel. You might feel **really** important. Or you might feel inadequate; or useless; or unnecessary... Forget about how **you** feel about it.... What does **God** say about it? What does God say about your place in the church? Well, God says that we’re all members of the body, and we each have a function.

God says:

<sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. <sup>6</sup> Having gifts that **differ** according to the grace given to us, let us use them....

So, what does “sober judgment” tell us? Forget about your feelings. The fact of the matter is:

- **you** have gifts.
- The fact of the matter is, this church, **depends** on you and your gifts.
- I belong to you. You belong to me.
- We are members of one another.
- I am deficient without you. You are deficient without me
- The fact of the matter is, **this** is God’s wonderful design.

And the fact of the matter is, the biggest hindrance to people finding their proper place in the church, is a lack of faith... God is gracious to us, and He gives us gifts... That’s the fact of the matter. But do you believe it?... You know what faith is. In faith, we believe that we’re saved... But is your faith also big enough, to believe that God has also given you gifts? And then, in faith, begin serving God??? You might be surprised, how as you step out in faith to serve, the spiritual gifts you’ve been given, begin to grow and develop.

How does this work? Well, Paul gives 7 examples of spiritual gifts (it’s not all of them):

If you’ve been given the gift of [prophecy](#), use it in proportion to your faith.

Now let me tell you, it takes a lot of faith to prophecy... If you believe the Lord is giving you a message to share with the church, so that God can speak into a specific situation, it takes a lot of faith to presume to speak on God’s behalf...

And for prophecy to truly be prophecy, it must **always** come direct from God. It can’t be from “cold reading”. It can’t be from research, or wise counsel... Prophecy only comes direct from God, and so we only prophecy in accordance with our faith. Only share what you know God has said. Don’t **add** to it. Don’t take away from it.

The next gift, is [service](#). And it’s a logical bit of advice, if your gift is “service”, **use** your gift by **serving**... Never

convince yourself that you “only have the gift of service”...  
**Only???** It’s one of the most important gifts...

- The gift of service, mows the widows lawn
- It minds the children of a single mother, so she can go to the doctor
- the gift of service helps set up for church, and it cleans up afterwards.
- The gift of service picks the oldies up and brings them to church, or helps them with their shopping
- And it delivers meals to those who are sick

If God has given you a gift of service, serve. Don’t hold back thinking “It’s somebody else’s turn”. God has given **you** that gift.

Similar advice for **teaching**. If you have the gift of teaching, teach. That’s what I’m doing right now, but you don’t have to preach a sermon to teach.

- You might teach Sunday School.
- It might be a simple kids story.
- Or leading a Bible study....

If you have the gift of teaching, **teach**. A gift of teaching doesn’t mean you won’t be nervous, but as you use that gift more and more, the nervousness does subside (trust me).

*e.g. Ron Watson Mylanta (ant-acid)*

If you have the gift of teaching, teach.

Some people have the gift of **exhorting**, and that’s exactly what they should do. Get alongside people, and encourage them. Urge them on in their faith.

If your gift is **giving**, do it generously. We’re all able to give something. And a church can’t pay its bills unless everybody’s giving something... But some people have a spiritual gift of giving. They may not be rich, but they’re filled with generosity... And when they see a brother or sister in Christ who is in need, they give. And they give without ulterior motives. They’re not expecting anything back...

They’ve just seen someone in need, and so they’ve gone without (for themselves), so they can help the other person out.

If you have a gift of **leadership**, do it with zeal. And this is where the “sober judgment” kicks in: As Christians, it’s been drummed into us, the virtue of humility... And I know for myself, I’m often reluctant to lead, because I don’t want to put myself out there as a leader... But if God has given us a gift of leadership, that’s exactly what we’ve got to do...

We see it in the New Testament – that’s how God orders His church. He raises up leaders: Elders; Teachers; preachers... And if those leaders are not stepping up to lead with enthusiasm and diligence – if they’re reluctant leaders, who’s going to lead?

And the final example he gives is the gift of **mercy**. If you’re somebody who has a gift of being able to visit the sick; to care for the elderly or disabled; or to spend time with the

lonely, don’t grump about it – do it with cheerfulness. Be merciful, and enjoy being merciful...

By the way, one time in a previous church, they did these “discovering your gifts” type surveys. And according to that assessment, I had a number of gifts, but for the gift of mercy, I scored a big, fat “zero”...

So, as I said, that’s not an exhaustive list – it’s just a few examples of spiritual gifts... But the point that Paul is making is this: We all have gifts; (I don’t have the same gift as you; You don’t have the same gift as me); and he is exhorting us, to use our gifts, diligently and faithfully to strengthen the body’s unity and to help it to flourish<sup>i</sup>.

**This**, is finding our place in the church. It’s not about finding a place where we can sit down on a Sunday morning and ‘lap it up’: It’s about stepping out in faith, using the gifts that God has given us, to strengthen the body’s unity, and to help it to flourish. And recognising gifts in others, and understanding **their** place in the church.

Questions????????

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<sup>i</sup> Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.