

Okay. The year is 56 A.D., and we're in Rome, Italy, and you've just come to a meeting. It just so happens that it's a Roman holiday. Now, that's important for you to know because the Romans didn't have a day off. They didn't have a Sunday or a Saturday. They just had holidays, and they had lots of them. So, every time there's a holiday, the church would do something special.

Here we are, we've come from many nations with many varied experiences, which is going to make this church extremely rich because there's so much background to handle so many different things. I hope someday there is a Roman experience where we can call in brothers and sisters from all over America to go to some big, hard place, and they don't know one another, but they're each rich in the Lord and each in the experience of church life.

Well, anyway, it's evening here in Rome, Italy. We rarely ever get to have an evening meeting here. They always have to be early in the morning because there are so many slaves. Sometimes we have to have our meetings at 4 o'clock in the morning because the slaves are not called on until, say, 6 or 7 o'clock. We have a lot of early-morning meetings, which is why you're all so sleepy-looking. But it's evening today, and we are in the home of Priscilla and Aquila. Now we're meeting at their home. What we're doing in chairs, I don't know, because chairs weren't invented for another way over a thousand years afterward. Anyway, we've managed to have chairs here. I will say this: you all look the part. Every one of you looks like an Italian, except Caesar and me, and that's all. I think everybody else, without exception. Don't you? Is there anybody else around here that looks—oh, yeah, yeah, I saw—sunburned Italian. We have brothers and sisters here from Jerusalem, probably one or two from Judea, I don't know. We have a good number from Antioch, and then from a number of Paul's churches. I don't know how long you've been together, perhaps as long as two years, perhaps as little as six months, but let's just call it a year by now, all right? By the way, the first year or two are the most difficult. They're the crucial ones. Most churches, in my own personal experience, crash and burn during the first two years. The largest mortality rate is in the first two years. Now, Paul has reached back in his writings, thoughts, and experience and told you all the possible problems you're going to have.

Now, there are a few of us here who are illiterate, and we're going to read that part of the book of Romans that we're covering tonight. So, I'd like to know — and I'd like to have someone who can not only read but also speak distinctly—to come and read chapter 12, say, 3 through 8. I'd like for someone else to come up and read 9 through 21. Who's a nice, distinct, clear reader? Who can speak well? Alright, somebody tell us. Who? Rosemary? Where are you, Rosemary? Come on up, and we'll cut that off. While you folks who got your tapes get your Bibles out, you can read them there wherever you are. We'll come back after this reading to save tape.

Alright, if you'd like to read a note that I have skipped verses 1 and 2 in chapter 12, and I've done that for a significant reason. Yes, sir? I'm just saying, hold on for just a second. Okay, hold on just a second. All right, you will notice that I have skipped verses 1 and 2, and we'll find out why later.

Well, the very first thing Paul led off with us here in Rome is talking about our gifts. Isn't that

wonderful? We all love gifts, and we all want to know what our gift is. What's my gift? What's your gift? What's your gift to the body, and what's your gift to the church, and so on and so on? Well, I'll tell you this: whatever your gift is, you're not satisfied with it. It's probably too humble for you. Unless, of course, you are an apostle, and I assure you, you're not satisfied with that gift. You wish you had never been born.

I remember...where's Paul writing this letter from? Corinth. What do you think of when you think of Corinth? Drugs. Drugs? And what? Wildlife. I also think of the over-exercise of gifts. Their meetings were an orgy of spiritual gift demonstrations, and he's had it just about up to here with these Corinthians. Now, this problem will recur among Christians everywhere. Basically, what is it? It's a contention for a position. Is that fair to say? This is a contention for a position, using as an excuse what God gave you as a gift. Or, in other words, blame it on God. "God gave me this gift."

Now, brothers and sisters, I've been around for a little while, and I want you to know that this is not just happenstance. This is serious, serious business when a man or a woman really, truly gets out of control with his...whatever it is he's good at. Now, I'm going to just take a moment to chase gifts. Can I talk about gifts just a little bit? Is a gift something given to you? Well, it's what it says, and it's your gift, yeah, but when is it given to you? At salvation? I'm not sure. I used to think that. I think it's probably given to you in your mother's womb.

I think I would have been a public speaker if I had never been saved. Now, I might not have been a public speaker only, but I was a public speaker before I was anything, and I was very frightened when I got up to speak. Still, it was a drive in me, and I didn't even know. In fact, I didn't figure out most of this stuff until the last two or three years, and brothers who are leaders in the church would have probably been leaders in industry or business—whatever you are, there are compulsive drives going on in you that make you what you are. It is no accident. Some of you, by the way, in your secular work, are really out of place. You're in something that really doesn't fit you. Eventually, you will get out of it and into what you're more comfortable with. Now, there may be a dozen things you're comfortable with, but there are hundreds of things you're not comfortable with. I wonder if that lights any light bulbs in any of you, if that turns anything on. Usually, just so you know how smart I am, usually we go through a lot of trial and error until we are 30 to 35, and if you have not figured out who and what you are by 35, you're usually considered a person who will never be able to figure out who or what or where they belong. He'll be job-skipping the rest of his life, probably, but we do a lot of tasting and experimenting up until we're 30 to 35 years old. There is a natural inclination among all of us. Now, I do not doubt that God will give you a spiritual gift, but brothers and sisters, we are also driven by the very nature of what God made us in our womb. Now we have come to the house of the living God, and that changes everything.

And I want to say to you, Priscilla and Aquila, and this letter which has arrived in Rome, Italy, is - now y'all listen to this very carefully - this letter is irrelevant. You know what that word means? Irrelevant. It has no purpose. This letter has no purpose outside the living room of Priscilla and

Aquila, and those of you there inside that little black box, and I'm sure you're uncomfortable in that little black box, I don't know if we as Christians will ever again be able to break down the barrier, the mindset that causes us to think in terms of the individual. Even in this room, in a close-knit community of believers, there is constant thinking of the individual, and the gift across America and around the world is always thought of as individual. I am telling you that this book is irrelevant outside Priscilla and Aquila's living room. It is not relevant to you nor to me. It is relevant to those of us who are gathered together from all over the Roman Empire, who live here together and will be living together for the rest of our lives.

Now, I know that this book has brought a lot of comfort to a lot of individuals. All of us have been helped and comforted by it, but it was not written to an individual. It was written to those of you who are here in Priscilla and Aquila's home today. Do you understand? It is written to a body. It has a head, it has hands, it has arms, it has fingers, it has legs, it has a body, it has eyes, ears, a nose, and it has all sorts of parts, and each part has a function. I would really prefer the word "function." And that body will suffer when one of those members begins to think more highly of himself than he ought to. Now then, let's look around the room and see just who might start thinking more highly of himself than he ought to.

Now, this is Italy now. This is not some other undiscovered land far across the ocean hundreds of years from now. This is Italy. Think about it for a moment. Who would be those most apt to think of themselves as more important than others? Those who are able to read very definitely would think of themselves as having...I would run that chance. Who else? The rich would very definitely, and the successful businessman. I want to throw him in here, and he is a pain in the neck throughout all of church history, because he always feels that if I can get rich, that proves I have a superior intellect, and these people all listen to me because I have money, and I came up from the bootstraps. I pulled my way up, and there are a lot of Christians who play to the businessman and his success. Okay, we'll get off of that one. Who else in this room might? Help me here quickly. The Jews may think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. Who else? The Greeks very definitely might feel more superior than others. Very definitely. Who else? The local Italians. The local Italians might really feel superior to these foreigners because they have Roman citizenship. They grew up in one of the cultural centers of the world and the most important city on earth. That is correct.

Who else might get this kind of conceit within himself or herself? Huh? Spiritual. Who? Spiritual. Those are peaks. Well, name me somebody, though. I don't want just a general idea. Absolutely. Priscilla and Aquila are perfect candidates for feeling superior to others because they've run around with Paul, Barnabas, and Silas. Absolutely. Who else? (The Roman soldier) Absolutely. He has authority when he walks out there, and I see that he also has very sensitive feelings, too. The Roman soldier—very definitely, absolutely. Okay, who else? Rufus. I think Rufus has every right to feel superior. He comes from an incredible background. I agree with you. Herodion—absolutely, Herodion. He is the nephew, cousin, or brother of royalty and one of the outstanding personalities of this century. Absolutely, no question about it. Who else? Those who live in

Caesar's household very definitely could get conceited, and those who belong to Narcissus' home, too, if he really is the counselor to Caesar, because, boy, they live in luxury, and they're up where things are happening.

How about the first convert from Asia? The first convert from Asia has quite a remarkable testimony. He can tell you all about John the Baptist and how he followed him. He was before any of us. He was even before Simon Peter. He was before the Lord. Yeah, I think so. Who else? Who else? The twin sisters, why would they be proud? They're the only twins here. Alright, fine, we've got to keep an eye on them. Yeah, and this couple, for the great sacrifice of opening their home to single brothers or whoever's living there.

And who else might get real, real proud? Who? Phoebe, after the letter comes, absolutely. Phoebe looks like she's in a class by herself, doesn't she? She came across the ocean, and she carried that through thick and thin, through water and floods; two ships sank out from under her, and all that stuff. Well, I'm going to tell you some others. There is this brother who has been taking all this to heart, doing it all perfectly - everything that's been told him, he does it. He gets up earlier than anybody, fast; he prays; he observes the days; he does this, he does that, and he is just feeling like he's got it made where nobody else has. You know who he is? He is a young, dumb, single brother. You'll probably see more of that kind of stuff sprouting out of the single brothers than in any other possible place.

Are you beginning to get an impression? What's the impression? We're all very, very, very, very vulnerable. And the unity of the church is really at stake here. Every one of us has a different disposition, and each of us has a real chance of feeling he's just a little bit more important than most people. I find it very interesting that Paul left himself out of this list. I can't comment on that, but he didn't put himself in this list of functioning, and the only comment I can make about that is that he does not consider himself local anywhere, and he knows that these are the problems he has to handle, rather than being part of the problem, but there are people prepared to blame everything on him. Are you aware of that? All the problems eventually come home to roost in Paul.

Well, I just want to go very quickly through what Paul said to you, and that is: will you please stop thinking that you're more important than the other brothers and sisters? Because you are in no way more important than others. Be sensible in figuring out who you are. Some of you are naturally prideful, and you will just always see yourself as a little bit more important than others. Brother, I would, if I were you, try to be just a little bit more sensible, and then just look at our body. You just look back here, and you start asking, which part would you give up? Which is the least important part of you? Which part would you give up? And you begin looking, and you see the little toe and the little finger, and you come to a simple conclusion: there's not any of it I want to give up. Well, what would you keep at the end? Well, you'd keep your heart and your brain, if you had nothing else to keep, maybe an eye, but boy, you sure wouldn't be much with all the other gone, would you? What if you just had one eye left, a heart and a brain, and then all the rest of it were tubes holding you together? Would you really feel very important then? Wouldn't you

miss the rest? Would you not? Oh, I would too. I think you ought to just really dwell on that for a moment. This book is irrelevant outside of the home of Priscilla and Aquila. You don't even have a gift of import. You don't have an important gift except as it's in the body, contributing to the body. Remove the body, and you're just an eyeball rolling around, of absolutely no value. You don't even have a brain to go to, to say, "Look what I see." You can't even see. You are a thumb, just—yeah, a thumb hanging out. There you go, maybe trying to hitch a ride to a body that it recently lost.

You are...I don't mean to say that you are of no value in the sight of God, but I mean your gift is properly seen through the eyes of the Lord and His devotion to His church. You and I become totally insignificant outside the body and the functioning of the body. You find your significance in Christ and the church, and you don't have it anywhere else, unless you go out, leave the church, and go start an organization, which is an abomination to all that the Lord Jesus lived and died for. He didn't die for a Christian organization; He died for the church. He died for the church.

All right, I just want to tell you a very simple story that happened to me today, and it was very genuine. I'm not just passing to you an illustration; it was impressed upon me. About an hour and a half or two hours before the meeting, Helen started cooking my dinner, and she fixed a really nice dinner. Now, one of the things that's always bothered me about dinner is that I can eat in ten minutes what it takes my wife two hours to fix. Does that ever bother you? Are you inconsiderate brothers? Never even thought about that, did you? You just figure those meals materialize out of nowhere, just like they do down at McDonald's. Hamburgers still are. Yeah, Helen was in there for an hour and a half or two hours cooking my dinner; it was delicious. I, in turn, was doing final preparation on this message tonight. I don't work very hard on a message; probably 40, 50, 60, 70 hours, anywhere from that to 30 to 40 years. They come really easy—no, I don't perspire over them—but it takes something. I'm in there just trying to get my heart ready and to keep from being afraid, from being scared. You don't think I get butterflies when I speak, do you? Well, I always get tense right before a meeting. In fact, I get very difficult to live with right before meeting. I think it starts easing up about the time I get to the front door, because then I'm either going to make a mess out of it or I'm going to do all right. I'm in there preparing a message for all of you people. And here I'm standing up in front of you, and the brothers—especially the single brothers—are very jealous of me.

They are. There is one or two of them saying, "Man, I wish they'd let me speak tonight. I got something to say." And the rest of them are saying, "Boy, I want to be another Gene Edwards." Which only proves that single brothers have no ambition whatsoever. I have had throughout my informal ministry, since I left the suit and tie—and I don't do this anymore, I don't think—and I did this without ever noticing it, coming into a meeting with my sleeves like this, and then I would, as I started to speak, I would just naturally do this. What I didn't think...I didn't even know what I was doing. And one day, one of the young brothers was asked to speak in a meeting, and he came up—I'm sorry—and I was in the meeting, and I was ashamed. I was sorry. I felt I had failed, brothers. I tried to speak to it, but I will tell you there will always be brothers who will imitate the

big shots. Whether the man is a big shot or feels like he's a big shot or not, there are those who dream of that. Now, I'm not going to get into humility here. Humility is not one of my strong points, but those of us who minister Christ are really nobody. And those...the higher you get up, the more nobody you get. Paul said that in his particular office, that's the lowest you could get on the totem pole, that they were the most expendable and the least important—and that's true. If a man knows his job and his heart, he is, because the most important thing is the church of Jesus Christ, the body.

Well, my dear wife doesn't speak publicly. I was able to sit down and have a few minutes alone, which I needed, because Helen was fixing my dinner. It took her two hours to prepare that meal. Now, I am asking you...in fact, I asked her, "Which is more important, what you're doing, sweetheart, or what I'm doing?" And she said to me, "What you're doing is more important because it's spiritual," and I was very sad to hear my wife say that. I think the chances of my going into the kingdom of God before my wife are pretty close to zero. I really mean that. Now, was my task spiritual and hers carnal? Absolutely not—not in the eyes of the Lord. Her function was as spiritual as anything I have ever done. She fixed—she prepared—excuse me, you don't know the word "fixed" up here, do you? She prepared a meal. We Texans—we're fixing to fix something. She prepared a meal for me, which took her a lot longer to do than the final preparation I made for this. My wife is glorious in the sight of my God, and she was functioning within the body of Christ today, and she is as important as the most esteemed member. Can you possibly grasp that? Then can you honor the lowly the way you honor the high? Then you don't realize who you will be honoring if you do this. Who will you be honoring? Oh no, I don't mean to get religious here. I mean, who in this room will you be honoring? Am I missing the point? Who? Everybody. Everybody. Everybody. Or not old stinkweed. Yeah, even old stinkweed.

Well, you know, there may be someone here with an IQ of 90, and I don't know if you think the 90 IQ is a high or low IQ, but that's just a hair below average. He may just be working on one cylinder, and it may be that his elevator doesn't go all the way to the top. Or maybe it does go to the top, but the doors are stuck. but he's working at full capacity. Who do you think your God is—someone who can be impressed? He who knows the heart knows our physical limitations. You know, I've got an IQ that's higher than 90, and I don't know if I'm as good a steward as the brother or sister who has a very ordinary IQ and is just barely limping through. I can tell you this: we both belong to the body of Christ.

I'm telling you, this book and this list of gifts are irrelevant outside Priscilla and Aquila's living room. Are you following me? I would encourage you not to think of yourself as so all-mindedly important, buddy, sister, and I would encourage you to start honoring other saints. Now, that doesn't mean to start giving a hard time to those who seem to be more gifted than others. I don't mean to leave that impression. "We'll fix that, buddy, we'll fix him. Alright, here." No, that's the whole point—that the position doesn't matter, and each of us is just about serving to our capacities.

I'm going to say something here that's very painful for me. You wouldn't have thought it if I hadn't

told you—extremely painful for me—and I hope it's not misunderstood. I'm going to tell you what it feels like to be in leadership, and in so doing, I'm going to admit that I am in a leadership role. Now, one of the most interesting things about Gene Edwards and leadership is that I have never for a moment felt like I was a leader. Never felt gifted. I didn't run for office in college. I wasn't the president of my class. You remember the guy who ran for office in college or high school, and those who were the real leaders? And you were kind of gentle with something, weren't you? I was, because they were gifted.

I was interviewed the other day on a national television program. Did you get that? A national television program, and between commercials, the man interviewing me said, "Gene, I understand you have dyslexia." I said, "Yes." And he said, "So do I." He said, "As I grew up, I always thought I was stupid because I couldn't spell, I couldn't read, and I couldn't write, and I couldn't add, and I couldn't track, and nobody could read my handwriting." Now, that's the story of my life. And he said, "And sometimes I would do something that was successful." He said, "I always looked at it as an accident." And I looked at him with my eyes, got the biggest saucers. I never saw anyone sum up my childhood or my whole life better than that. When you grow up colorblind, a youngest child with a domineering brother, and you can't read, and you can't write, and you cannot spell, and you cannot add, and you cannot subtract, you cannot draw; you sit on the back row to hide; you're taunted constantly by that big brother of yours who is constantly telling you—you have a mother who has a very high IQ and is very brilliant, and herself is a schoolteacher—and every night she cries while she tries to help you with homework which you cannot get. What impression would you have of yourself? I never thought of myself as a leader, but I am, and God gave me that gift.

It's taken me 50 of the 56 years I've been alive to admit that, because I've never liked leaders. My brother was a leader. He is the enemy. Therefore, all leaders are my enemies. Now, that's not the sad part of the story. The sad part of the story is that, in working with men throughout my life, I now think one of the saddest things that has come to me in the ministry is realizing that men want me to make them a leader, and that has backfired on me again and again, not when you don't feel like you're a leader, and other people are looking at you as a leader, and you finally figure out that they want you to make them a leader like you, so they can be a star, which has never meant anything to me—I've always felt like this is all an accident. This is a mistaken identity somewhere. I really and truly mean that. Then one day, this brother is just really full of wrath at you because you never made him a leader. Well, I have something to say to you: you either are or you are not, and nobody can make you one.

Well, some of the brothers probably will think, "Well, I guess by George I am. I'd better get to leading now." Well, you know how you can tell if you're a leader? That's whether or not people follow you. I began to notice that people were always following me, and I wondered what... It's kind of like the story of the guy who went to the funeral, tried to leave early, got in his car, and left. And he'd gone about five miles going back home. He looked in the back, and there was the entire funeral procession following him. No hearse around, nothing. And they're all...he tries to make a

U-turn on the bridge to get rid of them, to lose them—and they all do a U-turn on the bridge. I understand that's a true story. That's the way I always felt. I looked back and said, "Where are those people going?" I've seen brothers get pouty and sulky because people wouldn't follow them. Then I read something the other day that disturbed me as much as anything has ever disturbed me. Sociologists are beginning to find out that leadership is probably genetic. Now, boy, that really just knocks the props out from under me. I talked to a very dear and godly brother about this, and he said, "Gene, don't put too much stock in that, because remember, there is a divine genetics too." And that was very consoling to me—but not enough. I am telling you that it may be that leadership is genetic and decided in the womb.

I've never talked to anybody in my life like I'm talking to you tonight. I am telling you, don't get stuck on wanting to be a leader. It may be that that's just not who you are. I'm very fearful of saying that, because you may be and decide tonight you're not, and decide to put your head under a bucket. I should have started writing when I was 12 years old—of course, I couldn't spell—but I could spell enough so that I could understand what I wrote. But I was nearly 50 years old before I picked up a pen because I knew I couldn't write. Wouldn't you believe you couldn't write if you couldn't spell and you took 20 years to learn how to read? Well, you may be, brethren. It may sprout up, but I'm just trying to encourage you—don't be jealous of those who read. Will you be content with what you are? Not less than what you are, but oh brother, not more than what you are, sister. Now, I'm going to stop here for a moment. Talk to me. Is this doing anything at all, or do you all feel like, well, this is going to be irrelevant to me, Gene? You feel like it's irrelevant? It means a lot.

Okay, it's not something I want to talk about. I'd rather be talking about the Word, but there it is right there. That's what Paul is talking about, and neither my gift nor your gift nor anybody else's gift is worth a toot except within the church of God. I want you all to know that I cannot make any of you a leader. That is not a gift God gave me. I might even lay hands on you, but I can't give you anything. You're going to be what you're going to be, and most of us are going to be husbands and wives, and work, and live, and die, and have the privilege of being in the house of God and having some place in it. Don't damage the church by thinking of yourself more highly than you ought, and I really beg you, too, don't think even lower of yourself than you should. There's always a possibility you might sprout and bloom, but I would say to you that most of us live our whole lives as chiefs and not Indians.

One of the greatest paradoxes in my life is that my brother never became a leader. Isn't that incredible? He's been a solo act his whole life. He was the one who was the son of one of the most incredible leaders who ever lived—my daddy. And I was, you know, that's Goober head, that's what they call me, that's Goober head over there in the corner. He can read Batman and Robin and Superman, and that was about the end of my abilities right there. If you cut that off for a minute, I'll tell a very personal story.

...that one's a leader and one's not; one's a leader and one's not, but the leader is jealous of the one that's not a leader, and the one that's not a leader is jealous of the leader. This all begins to

get ridiculous. Do you understand? I'm jealous of those of you who beat music out on those drums over there. I am jealous of Alex's ability to create so much artistic expression in the church. I've never had that ability. Now, you may say, that's not him, that's so-and-so. Fine, I'm jealous of you, whoever you are. But don't you understand what a body is? A body is useless components. A body is useless components. Say, praise the Lord. Useless components. Alex's gift—not worth a toot. He'd probably be selling pencils on the streets of downtown. A worthless, useless component. We are all more important here than alone. We are all useless components, but when we become a functioning body, she suddenly becomes special. Suddenly, she is special. Not you, not me, but she is very special, and she can be very beautiful. I would encourage you to take pride in what you are in the church.

“But Gene, I don't think I do anything.” Oh, I can't do anything? How many times have the nothings of this world made it possible for the so-called somebodies to get their work done? I can tell you, I have been dying as one who ministers the gospel. I have been dying from a lack of those who will not function in the role of being helpful, and when I suffer, I feel the kingdom of God suffers. That's not a boast. I just feel that way. That's where my task fell. I never asked for this job. I didn't want it. I never dreamed about it, and I had no ambitions for it, but I got it. And every once in a while, a helper comes along, and it just...Together, we become tenfold more than what either one of us alone can be. And your contribution—you over here—is making a contribution to someone over here who hasn't even noticed you yet, because there is something you're doing that is making an enormous contribution to the body of Christ. Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to, but on the other hand, within the body of Christ, realize that we all are more than we would ever be anywhere else. The world may not agree to that, but we're looking through the eyes of God.

Okay, we got one other little point here to make in this. Thank God for gifts that differ; otherwise, you will end up a Baptist. A Baptist has two gifts—I'm going to keep saying this until the day I die—one gigantic tongue and one humongous ear, and that's all that ever happens in a Baptist church: those who speak and those who listen, and those who listen and those who speak, and those who speak and those who listen. And it will go on forever and forever and forever, world without end.

Now, would you, those of you who...I'm telling you what Paul's saying, those of you who teach, will you just, when you get through teaching, will you not think that the whole church owes you a living and should do everything you say? And those of you who do prophesy, would you not think that being a prophet automatically makes you chief cook and bottle washer? And those of you who serve, that doesn't make you the next thing over to the Apostle Peter. And those of you who exhort, will you, just when you get through exhorting, sit down—and that will thank you for exhorting us—and that's important. It does not put you above the rest of us.

Now then, he changes a little bit. Now go ahead and do this: if you are one of those who give, and there may be that someday the Lord will put somebody in the church who literally, their gift is to give; well, do it till it hurts and then shut up. You're not buying the kingdom, nor are you buying

control of the church of Jesus Christ. Say amen to that, bird dog, would you? He who leads, do it with excruciating diligence, which probably means being very, very, very careful in a leadership role, not to steamroll someone else. I don't know what it means, but just don't be a sloppy leader. You do not lead in order to be served. You lead in order to serve. If you're one of those people who are just compassionate with other people, well, stay that way, and don't ever start pretending you're compassionate when you don't feel compassion. If you can't do it compassionately, if you can't show your compassion compassionately, quit being compassionate. That probably doesn't make any sense, but nonetheless, all of us get a little bit weary, and some of us keep on functioning when it's nothing but hypocrisy. Don't do that, dear saint of God. Just don't do that.

Okay, I'm just going to read this to you: be devoted to one another in brotherly love, giving preference to one another in honor. And I just mentioned that—please understand that every human being in here deserves some honor. Every one of us, at one time or another, ought to be honored, and all of us should go out of our way to honor. Have eyes that see what other people have done for you. Now, we can always do this, but try to have eyes to see what others have done and know that every one of us really does need this. Robert, come here—I forgot your name deliberately. Every one of us needs this every once in a while. By the way, that's honoring. That's honoring, and it helps. It goes a long, long way.

I'll tell you two or three short stories. One is about a man who tells the story of working in the northeast, and I don't know what this fellow did, but it was in timber country, and his job was to get the foreman and men to get wood up some kind of a chute. He died, and they had to put another man in his place who was good at it. But he was the biggest grouch. Nobody had ever heard him say a kind word, and he always bellyached, and this is the true story that the man tells. He took over the job, and the foreman said to the other men, "Just remember, Joe is the best (and he named the task) on the northeastern border of the United States." He said that Joe began pushing those men and began working himself so hard getting that wood up there. He never complained. He never said a murmuring word. He was doing a better job than anybody had ever done in this business, and this went on for days. The man was completely transformed. Finally, the foreman went over and asked him, "What in the world has happened to you?" And he said, "That's the first time in my life anybody ever said anything nice to me."

You ought to be able to identify with that. Don't look for it, don't get pouty. I'm not talking to you; I'm talking to the others. You show honor to somebody else. Don't look for honor. Our eyes are often blind. I was in Tyler, Texas, sitting out at Lake Tyler. I sat down beside the lifeguard. I said to him, "Have you ever saved anybody out here?" He said, "Yeah, I have saved several people." Then he said, "Just a few weeks ago, a young boy disappeared out there, and I went out and got him and brought him in, and he was dead, and I brought him back to life." And I said, "Did his parents ever thank you?" And he did like this, and you could tell I had said something that obviously he'd given a lot of thought to. He said, "No." He said, "You know, I got my picture in the paper, I was interviewed on the radio, and the Kiwanis gave me an award, but the mother and daddy never thanked me." I bet that mother and daddy loved that kid and were grateful as they

could be that the child was alive, because that man alone deserved the credit for it. They never came back to say thank you.

A heart that sees gratitude and can see honor. Now, do you know something? I haven't delivered a message like this since I left the religious system over twenty-five years ago. Let me see if I can get my wife to read her. Honey, is that true? No, I'll forget it. I'm in the business of exhorting you. Alright, I'm just going to keep reading here. I think that verses 9 through 21 in chapter 12 (12:9-21) should be read publicly in the church twice every year. I really do. I wouldn't say that of another passage of Scripture in the entire Bible, Old or New Testament, but we just need to hear this. All of us need to hear it. So, I'm going to read it to you.

*Let love be without hypocrisy apart from what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Give preference to one another in honor. Don't lag in your diligence. Be fervent in your spirit. Serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope. When you have tribulation, persevere, and also keep on praying. Give to the needs of the other holy ones, and practice opening your home, and be hospitable. Bless those that persecute you and don't cuss them, don't swear at them.*

When someone in the church is rejoicing, don't pout—rejoice with them. If they're sad, don't poke fun at them—weep with them. *Be of the same mind one with another. Don't have a haughty mind. Run around with the dingbats of the church. Run around with the lowest. Don't think you're a hotshot.* That's still verse sixteen. *Don't ever take revenge. Now, respect what is right in the sight of all men,* and I want to come back to that and explain what that means. *If possible, as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take revenge.* He decided to go back and say this again. He said it in seventeen; he repeated it in nineteen. Let's throw something else in the middle there: *vengeance is God's; He will repay. If you have an enemy, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink, and if you do, then you'll be heaping burning coals upon his head.* And there's an old, ancient story about the woman who came to her pastor and said, "My husband mistreats me terribly." He said, "Well, have you ever tried or considered heaping burning coals upon his head?" And she said, "No, but I tried a hot skillet once." *Evil will seek to overcome you. Evil will seek to overcome you. When evil comes to seek to overcome you, overcome it with good.*

Now then, that passage just needs to be reread to all of us. A passage like this is actually quite dangerous, brothers and sisters. Very dangerous. If we dwell here, we get into salvation by good works, but the whole point of the first part of this chapter is that you're not going to impress God by anything. Your gift doesn't get you anywhere. This is an exhortation that we all simply need to hear from time to time. I'll tell you something else: when we let our spirits, the fires of our spirits, run low and the embers almost die, we tend to totally lose all of what I just read here, and that's not you, and that's not me. That is some of the finest Christians who ever breathed air. It's true of all of us. We will tend to revert to the very opposite of these things, and I can tell you, I know that for a fact because I've done it. Things that I would not ever do, I find myself slipping into if those fires have, for some reason, been made low. We really need to read this a couple of times a year.

It's called Christian ethics. God's not going to love you more if you do, or less if you don't, but I'll tell you, a lot of this stuff is really important to the harmony of the body of Christ.

I want to go through a lot of this really quickly with you. If you can't love sincerely, don't love with hypocrisy. You might get the habit of doing it. You will lose who you are. There is evil lurking around. Hate it. Go for the good. Honor one another. In verse twelve, there is the statement, "*Rejoice in hope.*" I love another translation, and I would like to read it to you: *base your happiness on the hope you have in Christ.* Now, that is terribly important. If you base your happiness on anything other than your hope in Christ, you may literally lose the Christian faith. Certainly, you'll be disappointed. You're going to be disappointed by man, and you're going to be disappointed with God.

There really is an aspect of the Christian faith that's futuristic. Now, I've often heard it said, "We have a religion that's pie in the sky when you die by and by." And that's true— a lot of people think of nothing in the world but heaven, heaven, heaven, heaven, heaven. They'll end up saying, "He's so heavenly minded, he's no earthly good." But I have never appreciated that statement. I don't believe that, if it's truly a hope of the eternals. There is an element of our faith, when all else is gone, that is both past and future, and not present, and that's against everything I believe and teach, but it's true. There are times when things have gotten so hard for me—I'll give a personal testimony here—the only thing I could say is, "Well, thank God at least, as unworthy as I'm feeling, as unworthy as I'm getting treated, I know that Jesus Christ saved me. I may be all I've got left, but one day, somebody named God loved me enough to save me. I've still got dignity. I still got worth." And that's sometimes all I've got. There is that which is past, that which He did for me in the past, and proved His love to me, and there is that which is future.

Boy, when things get rugged and rough and hopeless, there is a point of saying there is glory ahead, and you put your happiness—the happiness factor—goes for the future, not for the present. If you try to find happiness in present things, you will be disappointed. Base your happiness on your hope that you have in Jesus Christ. That, by the way, is also present. That is also present. I am now saved, and I am now in Christ, and all the riches of Christ are mine now. I am one who is wealthy, for He is mine.

Now I'm going to say it again: there's nothing in this book that is relevant outside of the home of Priscilla and Aquila. All this stuff I just said to you may be a little bit helpful to you; nonetheless, you will lose if it's not within Priscilla and Aquila's home, their gathering, and the gathering of the body of Christ. I hope you're following me. That verse is not for the individual. That verse is for the individual who's in the ecclesia. One day, I need you to tell me my hope is in Christ. Forget trying to be happy somewhere else; find happiness somewhere else, and there will be a time when I will need to tell you the same thing. Now, I just told you, did I not? Say amen. Well, one of these days, you may find Gene Edwards just about four feet down, walking in the cracks of the oak floor, and I may need you to tell me that because I may have forgotten. It is relevant only within the body of Christ. Are you with me? Alright. When somebody needs something (I'm in verse 13), would you make sure they get some money? He should get, if not money, food, or something.

Take care of one another. And stop saying, I don't want that guy sleeping over at my house. And as far as the city council is concerned, who wants this building condemned, or the people up and down the street who persecute you, don't get so mad at them that you swear. And if you do swear, ask the Lord to forgive you, and don't do that anymore. Well, that's really angry when you get mad enough to swear.

Verse 16: You will find it recurring again and again and again in Paul's letters, and it has nothing to do with an ecumenical church. It has nothing to do with the National Council of churches. It has nothing to do with you and another Christian. This has to do with a local body of believers who meet in Priscilla and Aquila's home: have the same mind toward one another. If two of you don't have the same mind about something, what are you going to do? What are you going to do? Somebody tell me, what are you going to do? I can give you one suggestion. Accept his point of view. You haven't been married, most of you, yet. Boy, it's when you back off to one another and you are just locked, and there's no giving in, and finally one of you gives in to the other's view, and the other one feels so horrible that the other one gives in to your view. And then you have another fight. I have a friend, or had a friend years ago, who gave me one of the best pieces of advice I've ever received. He said, when somebody starts to shoot you, take the gun away from them and shoot them with their own gun. He meant by that this very thing. Just pull the rope right out from under them. Say, "Great, I think you have a better idea than I've got." It's all right. It doesn't hurt to lose. It doesn't hurt a bit to lose. You got saved, and you are rich in Christ today because somebody lost—lost and lost and lost and lost again. It's okay to lose. By the way, I would like for everyone here and listening to me on television to know that in all of this, I sin not. I am perfect in these things, and by the way, I also have the Sears Tower up for sale this week, too.

I'm no better at any of this than you are. These are things that we bring back to mind to one another. There is no more important passage to be familiar with in Scripture. The worst thing you could do with what is being said here tonight is to demand it of another human being. That's not what this is for. This is an exhortation to bring us back and cause us to remember. It is not for you to say, "Listen here. We're not of the same mind, and Gene said we're supposed to be the same. Bye. Why aren't you giving in to me?" I picked over all the guys here, didn't I? These are the rules here, saints. None of us is going to live up to this. Certainly not all the time, but it's an admonishment that brings us back.

I don't know if you've ever been on a large ship. I was on a very large ship once, in a horrible storm. I don't even know if they have these things on ships anymore, but I assume they do. Something called a gyroscope—do they still, can they still, are those things still in existence? It's a wheel that turns round and round very fast and keeps a ship on course. And I could stand there and watch a giant wave, incredible waves, hit the side of that boat, and it would just go like that, and then it would come right back. Hit and just come right back. That gyroscope was bringing it back. This is gyroscope territory. These are things that we cannot hold in our minds. We cannot hold these things in our minds. We come back, and we've got them again and again.

Alright, verse 17. *Respect what is right in the sight of all men.* Now, let me explain what that means.

If you have no other concept of right or wrong or ethics, then ask yourself, how would the world look on this? Now, if you're one of those pessimistic people who think that the world's going to hell and that everything's getting worse and worse and worse, my own personal opinion is it couldn't get any worse than it started out. The first person who was like unto us was Cain and Abel, and Cain killed Abel. Now that was the beginning of this race. It started with murder and has kept up with murder, and we're just bad, folks; that's what we are. So, you would say, well, you know, the world condones anything. That's not true. The world doesn't even condone adultery. Hollywood does, but Centerville, Iowa, doesn't. The teachers on my faculty didn't. I mean, they might have all been committing adultery, but when it got out in the open that someone on the staff was committing adultery, there was a standard there. You may be taking drugs, and somebody else may be taking drugs, but society condemns drug taking, and it condemns murder. It condemns ugliness and viciousness.

It doesn't even respect cursing, but everybody curses. That may be true, but if you go around and check people out, they will feel more comfortable living and working in an atmosphere where it wasn't going on. Even the heathen...the heathen have a sense of that which is right and wrong. Society still has standards, even if it doesn't live up to them. There are things that are unethical. There are still rules in businesses about how you treat lower-level and higher-level employees. Brother, if you can't figure out anything else in the Christian life, ask yourself, is this acceptable in the society of the world? And if you will be honest with yourself and not play games, it's a good measure to go by. Why? Does society condone—this society in Chicago, Illinois—does it condone drunkenness? We've got little guys running around here in cars with little blue uniforms on, big old sirens up on top that say, We don't condone drunkenness. Do we condone adultery? Go ask a divorce lawyer if society condones adultery. It does not condone adultery. You don't have to ask if society condones drugs. You know it doesn't condone drugs. Does it condone conspiracy? In the workplace, we've got laws that will protect employees from employers mistreating them. It's interesting that there's still a standard in the world.

And if you can't figure anything else to do, then do that which is acceptable in the sight of all men. That will put you under a pretty heavy standard. Be at peace with everybody you can be, and let God repay us; it's not up to you to repay. I know that sounds very simple, but I believe every one of us has a tendency to want to inflict pain. Is that not true? When you've been hurt, do you not also want to hurt? Is it not something that causes us all to have to get down on our knees and say, "Lord, please forgive me and help me"? Be my help. I don't want to really inflict pain on this person. Anytime you raise your voice and holler at somebody, there's an element of vengeance in it. Does that make any sense to you?