

The Gospel in Romans: Romans 12:3-8

INTRODUCTION

1. The first two verses of chapter 12 set the stage for a practical and powerful look at gospel-centered sanctification.
 - The call to holiness issued by the Holy Spirit through Paul is given “by the mercies of God” (12:1).
 - Thus, the mercy God has shown us in Christ is both the basis for and instrument of our devotion to Him.
2. Verse 1 exhorted us to offer our bodies to God; verse 2 commanded us to allow the continual renewal of our minds.
 - Now in verses 3-8 Paul continues this theme of transformed thinking: how the gospel re-shapes our thoughts.
 - Christianity is not merely something we join or believe or do; it is how we think and live and what defines us.
3. Most of us have been poisoned without realizing it; we have been indoctrinated by the world in our view of self.
 - We live in a narcissistic culture where religionists proclaim, “The most important thing is to forgive yourself.”
 - Psycho-babbling baloney. Most important is knowing we are forgiven by and in Christ. Learn to think biblically.

I. HOW TO THINK OF OURSELVES (3)

A. *Thinking Honestly, Humbly, and Soberly*

1. Paul saw his office as an apostle as a gift of God’s grace. (1:5; 1Co. 3:10; 15:10; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 3:8)
 - His reference to the “grace given to me” may be more general here, but it is nonetheless powerful.
 - If Paul as an eyewitness and apostle of Christ could speak thusly, we should certainly be humble!
2. His exhortation is to “everyone among you,” i.e. every Christian brother and sister everywhere.
 - The demand for sound thinking regarding oneself is applicable to every child of God at all times.
 - Pride is a constant danger among God’s people; we must think biblically of ourselves and the world.
3. There is a rhythm to Paul’s language in verse 3 not apparent in most English translations.
 - Four times in a single verse he uses the word *φρονεω* (*to think*) alone or with an attached prefix.
 - “Don’t think more (*ὑπερφρονειν*) of yourself than you should think (*φρονειν*) but think (*φρονειν*) with sober thought (*σωφρονειν*).”
4. Faith is a gift. Salvation is God’s work, not your own. The only thing you contribute is the sin forgiven. (Jn. 6:44; 10:26-29; 1Cor. 4:7; 2Cor. 4:5-7; Gal. 6:14; Eph. 2:1-7, 8-9; Php. 1:29; 2Tim. 1:9-10; Titus 3:3-7)
 - If these things are true (and Scripture affirms they are), we have nothing to boast of except Christ.
 - It is only by God’s grace that we are who we are, that we are where we are, that we do what we do!
 - Consequently we have *nothing* to boast about except the undeserved work Christ did for us.

“Pride is eliminated when one recognizes that the faith one has is a gift of God, not the result of one’s own virtue.” –T. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 653

B. *Thinking According to the Measure of Faith*

1. We are “to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”
 - This is a difficult statement in some ways, and it could be interpreted to mean different things.
 - Does Paul mean we are to think soberly in light of the variety in God’s gift of faith?
 - God gives some people more faith than others; the fact we have any faith at all we owe to him.
 - Likewise, as Paul goes on to elaborate, God’s gift of faith is accompanied by various gifts for service.
 - These observations are certainly true, but there is reason to think Paul is saying something else.
2. God has assigned a certain measure of faith, not just personally but redemptively and corporately.
 - The gospel tells us who we are apart from grace and our need for a Savior (1:18-3:20).
 - It tells us Christ is the Savior who redeemed us by His own blood apart from our works (3:21-4:25).
 - We have peace with God because we are justified by faith, in spite of our works not due to it (ch.5-8).
3. The word Paul uses for *measure* here is *μετρον*, *an instrument for measurement* or a *standard*.
 - If Paul may be saying, “Evaluate yourself in light of how much faith God has given you.”
 - But this hardly seems to support his point in context; he is urging humility, not human comparison.
 - It may not be very helpful to estimate how much faith I have, whether I consider it great or small.
 - But it seems more likely Paul is saying, “Evaluate yourself in light of the standard of faith God gave.”
 - This standard is the gospel; we weigh ourselves in light of its teaching; we live by what it says of us.
 - The gospel says I am the greatest sinner I know *and* that I am more loved than I can imagine!
 - This standard of faith helps me think of myself honestly, humbly, and soberly.
 - The gospel won’t let me to think too much or too little of myself; it allows neither pride nor despair.
 - Instead of thinking of myself too much (too often), the gospel continually fixes my eyes on *Jesus*.

II. HOW TO THINK OF CHRIST'S BODY (4-5)

A. Thinking About Unity Amid Diversity

1. The human body is a favorite metaphor for Paul in describing the Church, but it's more than a metaphor.
 - The Body of Christ is an organic entity, living, dynamic, spiritual relationship joined by and in Christ.
 - Like the human body, it has discernible parts, but also like our bodies, it works as a unit and grows.
2. The various parts of Christ's Body contribute to its organic wholeness and dynamic functionality.
 - Not all of the parts are the same, nor do all have the same gifts or work to do in the Body.
 - But the Body is a unit, not pieces and departments but one entity which exists to glorify the Lord.
3. Both unity and diversity characterize the Body of Christ.
 - The diversity is a reflection of the disparate people, backgrounds, cultures, etc. that compose it.
 - Unity is created by and in Christ as those with nothing in common share the only thing that matters.
4. We may not have the same background, likes, language, culture, but we have the one thing that counts.

B. Thinking About Corporate Function

1. The diversity of parts and functions within the Body contribute to the overall health and function of it.
 - As the individual members of Christ's Body work with the strength God gives us...
 - ...other members are strengthened, the Body grows, and the Lord is glorified in and by the work.
2. If we share in the Body of Christ, we not only share in Christ but we are "members of one another."
 - I am connected to every other believer in Jesus, whether I perceive it, like it, live it, or not.
 - God's family is my family, and I am called to love, serve, and sacrifice for that family. (Mark 3:31-35)
3. An important clarification needs to be made about what this diversity is and is NOT.
 - The diversity in Christ speaks of people and their varied backgrounds, cultures, and languages.
 - In spite of all the things that separate us, we find unity and harmony and peace in Christ.
 - The bond of God's love and Christ's blood is more powerful than anything that could separate us.
 - But the diversity is not denominations, doctrines, and religious practices which divide Christians.
 - These divisions do exist, but they are unfortunate, not praiseworthy; bugs, not design features.
 - Some will say, "But God has providentially ordained the differences for our own good."
 - It is undeniable God has ordained whatever comes to pass, and He uses division for greater good.
 - But His prescribed will is agreement and unity, not disagreement and division. (1Co. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-6)
 - We should not mistake sinful and unfortunate circumstances God uses for good things He intends.
 - It is not good that Christians disagree about baptism, worship, church polity, eschatology, etc.
 - Has God brought good things from this disagreement? Of course. That is what He does all the time.
 - But that doesn't mean these things *are* good by nature; they are reminders we are not yet glorified.

Speaking of things Christians disagree about...

III. HOW TO THINK OF THE GIFTS OF GOD'S GRACE (6-8)

A. General Observations on God's Gifts to His People

1. The Bible is clear that God gives gifts to every believer for His glory and the good of the Body. **1Pe. 4:10**
 - The gifts are variously discussed in Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4; and 1 Peter 4.
 - Not everyone has the same gift, but everyone in the Body has a way they can serve and contribute.
2. We should be wary of placing either too much or too little emphasis on individual giftedness.
 - The Corinthian church was very gifted, but they were fractured by pride and division because of it.
 - I confess to not being a fan of "Spiritual Gifts Assessment" which often feeds our natural narcissism.
 - You do not have to know your gift to be faithful where you are and to serve where you can.
 - When someone doesn't serve others or isn't faithful because of their "gifts," something is wrong.
 - On the other hand, we should recognize not everyone has the same skills or fits into the same role.
 - Not every Christian can or should be in a teaching or exhorting role; not everyone is a leader.
 - Recognizing our strengths and weaknesses can help us serve more effectively and happily.
 - There are some things *every* Christian ought to do, but some will always be better at it. (e.g. mercy)

B. General Observations on the Gifts in 12:6-8

1. First, note the works being described in these verses are gifts, not necessarily offices.
 - Offices are associated with at least two of the functions: prophets & teachers. **Eph. 4:11-12; Jas. 3:1**
 - You could also argue *leadership* refers to the office of elder and *servicing* to deacons. (1Tim. 3:1-13)
 - But despite these associations, the emphasis here is clearly functional, not positional or official.

2. Second, note there are two broad categories: speaking functions (3) and serving functions (4).
 - Speaking: prophecy, teaching, exhorting; Serving: service, giving, leading, mercy.
 - This is not necessarily how Paul is organizing the list, but the same categories appear in **1Pet. 4:11**.
 - This distinction will be evident in the local church, though we all should serve and share the gospel.
 3. Third, note the presence and emphasis on practical and mundane service to the Body.
 - Most people who emphasize spiritual gifts focus on the miraculous and dramatic gifts. (e.g. tongues)
 - Christians disagree on whether the miraculous and revelatory gifts continue today. (cf. 1Cor. 13:8ff)
 - Even in our congregation and eldership there is not perfect consensus, yet we have unity in Christ.
 - But Paul emphasizes the “boring” gifts so desperately needed, gifts like compassion and leadership.
 - There are entire denominations defined by charismatic errors (e.g. pray in tongues or unsaved).
 - Are we defined by as strong a commitment to the non-miraculous fruit of the Spirit? **Gal. 5:22-23**
 - Don’t tell me how gifted you are in leadership or tongues or preaching if you don’t have love.
 - Churches have been abused and train-wrecked by “gifted people” leading them. (e.g. Mark Driscoll)
 - May the Lord give us more people with “boring,” practical gifts for loving and serving His Body!
- C. *Specific Observations on the Gifts in 12:6-8*
1. Prophecy is to be exercised “according to the analogy of the faith” (the ESV is somewhat misleading).
 - Prophecy here is, presumably, the occasional and local inspiration of individuals by God. (cf. Ac 13:1)
 - Unlike apostolic revelation which was infallible and universal, prophets were tested. **1Co. 14:29-33a**
 - Their words were judged on a case-by-case basis, rather than being universally accepted like Paul’s.
 - On what basis was prophecy tested? It was exercised “according to the proportion of the faith.”
 - “The faith” – the definite article is present in Greek, not a personal pronoun as in the ESV.
 - What claims to be from God must be tested by prior revelation. **1Co. 14:37; 1Jn. 4:1, 6** (De. 13:1-5)
 - Prophecy would pass away (1Co. 13:8), but the same principle applies to teaching today. **Ac. 17:11**
 2. The rest of the gifts and functions are expressed somewhat differently in the passage.
 - The idea is that in every case we are to exercise our gifts humbly and with due regard for the Body.
 - There is no place for pride, personal glory, or a desire to perform for one’s own fulfillment.
 - E.g. “We should do X because this is *my* ministry, or how I exercise *my* gift.” This is inappropriate.
 - It isn’t about you. What is best for the Body? What will best minister to its needs and glorify Christ?
 3. Teaching and exhortation are two related but distinguishable gifts.
 - Apostles (universal, infallible), Prophets (local, fallible), Teachers (expound), Exhorters (encourage)
 - There does appear to be some difference between an OT prophet and prophets in the NT church.
 - NT prophecy is not fallible, but the prophets are not accepted with the same credibility as apostles.
 - In other words, every “word” from a prophet was tested, but whenever Paul spoke it was accepted.
 - Teachers expound the existing content of revelation; exhorters encourage its application in life.
 - Without teaching we die of malnutrition; without exhortation we suffer from lack of application.
 - The Church needs people gifted in both, some to unpack and others to stimulate people to apply.
 4. Serving, giving, leading, and showing mercy are all important gifts without which we cannot thrive.
 - A church with only teaching may become cold, intellectual, or even Pharisaical.
 - We must not only learn the faith; we must *live* it! Every Christian is called to serve others.
 5. Certain roles and functions are the responsibility of every disciple, but some are more gifted at it.
 - I used to think I was gifted at evangelism; then I began working with Jacob. *That* is a gift!
 - As a pastor I do biblical counseling every week, but God has sent other *more* gifted individuals to us.
 - I visit homes and hospitals, but when I visit after Bob & Margie P. I see who has the *real* gift!
 6. This doesn’t mean I can say, “Well, I’m just not gifted in those areas. I will just focus on teaching.”
 - I will continue to evangelize, counsel, and visit in order to show mercy and encourage.
 - But I should recognize the gifts God has given other disciples, and encourage them to use them.
 7. I *should* focus on teaching, and that means prioritizing and organizing my time accordingly. **Ac. 6:2-4**
 - Faithful teaching requires time to study, pray, and prepare; that must be a priority in my ministry.
 - I cannot neglect my other responsibilities, but how foolish to neglect my primary work to do what other Christians are more gifted and better able to do!

Conclusion: We must learn to think biblically about ourselves, about the Body, and about our gifts and role in the Body.