

January 28, 2024

“Faith and Transformation”

Romans 12:3-8

Lesson 3

Intro

Paul’s letter to the Romans was written to the church there before he himself had ever gone to Rome to see these Christians face to face. According to Acts 2:10, there were Jews and proselytes from Rome in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Some of these no doubt must have become Christians before they left to return to Rome, and started the church there. Romans can be split into two major sections. Chapters 1-11 contains deep theology, some of the deepest in all of Scripture. In chapters 12-16, Paul instructs them in how believers should live in light of the truth of the doctrines he develops in the first section. Today’s passage is from this second section.

Read Romans 12:3-8

1. vs. 3: Paul introduces this thought with the phrase, “by the grace given me”

This phrase accomplishes two things, both of which are important

This information is not Paul’s, but was given to him divinely

This phrase indicates Paul’s authority to teach is from God, not self-appointed

Paul’s instruction is “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought”

Scripture continually stresses the need to be humble, to avoid being arrogant

In vs. 1-2, Paul has just told them to do two things that lead to this thought

Present their bodies as living sacrifices to God

Be transformed by being renewed in their minds—in other words, change

It is too easy for humans to be proud rather than humble; this is a problem for many

Paul finished this verse with a command/recommendation for how they are to think

He tells them to think with “sober judgment”

This means to think rationally and appropriately, with the head and not the heart

He tells them to think “in accordance with the faith God has given you”

This could be either of two meanings, or both

Faith could be the common faith all Christians have in Christ

Faith could be the faith given to each according to their needs/growth

Either way or together, the goal and instruction leads to the same place

The measure is to think by faith, not in comparison to another person

2. vs. 4: Paul notes that we have a body with many parts (members)

These various members don’t each have the same role or function

Paul develops this idea in I Cor. 12:12-14 and Eph. 4:16 also

3. vs. 5: Paul makes the connection that the church is a collection of people who are one

There are many members, but we are *one* body

We are meant to function together, doing our specific role so the body functions effectively

We need each other, each one doing the thing they are made to do

4. vs. 6: Paul notes two things here

First, we all have different gifts or talents

We need each of these gifts to function well as a body

If everyone does the same thing, there will be needs unmet and uncared for

Second, Paul uses the word “gifts”, which might get confused by some

These are not given to signify a person as special or unique

Everyone has been “gifted” in some way to serve the body

Paul is trying to show the church that it is made up of diverse peoples with diverse talents

All these gifts are intended to be used so as to show love to other believers

The first gift he mentions is prophecy, which also can be misunderstood

Prophecy can mean “predicting the future

But it also means proclaiming spiritual information for the benefit of believers

5. vs. 7: Paul continues his listing of possible “gifts” that people may have

The first he notes is serving

Service is a way to describe the work Christians do on behalf of others

Types of service include Christian ministry, being a deacon, or secular authority

Other gifts in this list are specific kinds of service

It seems highly likely he’s referring to the office of deacon here

The second type he notes is teaching

Teaching here is different from prophesying

Prophesy is based on revealing information placed in the prophet’s mouth

Teaching involves communicating the truth of the gospel

In the first-century church, many people were not able to read

They heard the teaching from the teacher, rather than reading it

6. vs. 8: In this verse, Paul deals with one well-known and three lesser-known gifts

He begins with encouraging others

Paul writes about encouraging and encouragement 80 times in his writings

He is certainly noting its importance to the growing Christian family

Those with this gift are being encouraged to use it often for others’ benefits

The first of the lesser-known gifts/talents is giving

This is something all Christians are called to do

To some, however, it seems that this quality comes easier to than to most

Giving at its simplest is sharing with another of the church

This could be money, but could also be time, talent, or possessions

Paul says for these so gifted to give “generously”

This points to the idea of being devoted to it, to a singleness of purpose

The giving is always done with no ulterior motives for giving

The next gift is that of leading

In Paul's letters, this idea of leading occurs 8 times

He uses it to refer to church leadership, family/household leadership, and self-management

The idea is that there is someone who presides, who has a leadership position

Someone who leads must also have good self-control in a godly sense

The final gift mentioned is showing mercy

This gift calls for both action and a proper attitude

The mercy we have received from God is the basis for our own acts of mercy

Paul notes that showing mercy should be done "cheerfully"

These last three gifts are things that all Christians should possess and demonstrate

Application: All spiritual gifts are important, but not everyone has the same gift (which is good). Our natural tendency is to pay more attention of the gifts that are more visible, more "out front". The things we do are varied, but they are all necessary to the smooth and harmonious functioning of the church (the body, not the building!). No human body functions to its highest potential unless all its parts work together. This is also true of the body of Christ; it will not function to its highest potential until all its members use their gifts. To prevent either pride in one's gift or the non-use of one's gift, Luke 17:10 is a good reminder: "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

Prayer: Father God, you have called all of us to serve who claim to be Yours. Help us to recognize how you have gifted us and what you call us to do for You, even if it's not one of our "gifts". Help us remember we are all a part of Your family, Your body, and that no one is unimportant to your church and to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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