

## Faith and Transformation

Lesson for January 28, 2024

### Unit II: Learning about Faith

**Adult Topic:** Using Our Unique Gifts

**Background Scripture:** Romans 12:3-8

**Printed Text:** Romans 12:3-8

**Key verse:** “*We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.*” (Romans 12:6a, NIV)

Em Griffin in his book *The Mindchangers* describes an experiment done by Solomon Asch with groups of 12 people. They were brought into a room where four lines of unequal length were displayed. They had to decide which two were the same length and publicly vote for their choice. Person after person after person (11 in all) voted for the wrong line--because they had all been told to ahead of time. The one individual who was in the dark couldn't imagine how in the world all these seemingly normal people could all choose the wrong line. When it was his turn to vote, he had to decide, "Do I go with what I know my senses are telling me, or do I go with the crowd?" 1/3 of those tested caved in to group pressure and changed their vote to agree with their peers.

Em Griffin, *The Mindchangers*, Tyndale House, 1976

Unifying Lesson Principle: We all face pressure to conform to the world. How can we recognize our unique giftedness and withstand pressure to conform? Paul reminds us that through faith, God transform us by renewing our minds so that we can discern God’s will (*Townsend Press Commentary*, 2023-2024, p. 196).

### Key Terms

- 1. Body** (verse 5) – The essential physicalness of human existence is supremely set forth in the New Testament. The incarnation is God's ultimate endorsement of the physical body. Jesus’ body becomes the locus for God's redemptive activity in the world. Indeed, his body is both temple and sacrifice in that it manifests the glory of God and atones for the sins of the world (Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; John 1:14; 2:21; Romans 3:24-25). The bodies of the regenerated are also the arena of faith and practice. The primary allegiance of the body is not to the things of this world or to the sinful desires of the flesh (Romans 6:12-23).

2. **Faith** (verse 3) – Belief, trust, and loyalty to a person or thing. Christians find their security and hope in God as revealed in Jesus Christ and say “amen” to that unique relationship to God in the Holy Spirit through love and obedience as expressed in lives of discipleship and service.
3. **Function** (verse 4) – The action for which a person or thing is specially fitted or used or for which a thing exists – purpose (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>).
4. **Gifts** (verse 6) – In general, in Scripture the word “gift” has three senses: gifts men give to men; sacrificial offerings presented to God; and gifts God gives to men, especially in connection with salvation, righteousness, and his grace. It is the latter of these three used in Romans 12:6.
5. **Grace** (verse 3) – God’s grace is usually defined as undeserved favor. It is God blessing humankind so as to sustain and empower the Christian life; others see it as forgiveness, life, and salvation.
6. **Members** (verse 4) – The Bible describes the church as the body of Christ, and Christians as members of that body. The word is used as the equivalent with “the body”. It is the difference in character and gifts of individual Christians which leads Paul to speak of the variety of members, which, though of manifold functions, are equally important to the completeness of the body.
7. **Think** (verse 3) – To have understanding; to exercise the powers of judgment, conception, or inference – reason.

*(Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology).*

## **Lesson Background**

The book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul to the Christians in Rome. He probably did this while he was in Corinth on his third missionary journey, in A.D. 57 (Acts 20:2–3). He wrote Romans to unite the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome in the gospel. He also wanted the church in Rome to become the base of operations from which he could proclaim the gospel in Spain (15:22–24). The ultimate goal of preaching the gospel is the glory of God (11:33–36). Paul longs for the Gentiles to become obedient Christians for the sake of Christ’s name (1:5).

Paul fights for the new Christian doctrine of not having to keep the old Mosaic law and then observes it himself. The reason for this is not that he is double-minded, but that he is keeping the customs of each person he ministers to.

Romans Chapters 1-11 Paul addresses the unrighteousness of all people (Romans 1:18—3:20). He then emphasizes God's provision of salvation through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21—5:21). Jesus is the source of all righteousness (3:21–31), making faith, as characterized by Abraham, our means of realizing this provision (Romans 4). Christ blesses people with sharing His righteousness (Romans 5). In chapters 6 through 8 Paul highlights sanctification, or holy living, which comes through Christ (Romans 6:1—8:39). There is no condemnation for those in Christ (Romans 8:1). Paul concludes the section with the teaching that nothing can separate the believer from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:37–39). Chapters 9-11 deal with Israel (Romans

9:1—11:36). Paul desires the salvation of his own people, yet most were hardened at that time (BibleRef.org).

Romans 11 ended with a hymn describing God's vast ownership of the universe. Romans 12 begins by asking the question, "Since He owed us nothing and has given us great mercy, how should we respond?" The answer is a life of self-sacrificing worship spent serving the Lord and other believers, refusing revenge, and overcoming evil with good.

Romans 12 is significant as it contains teachings and exhortations on Christian living and ethical behavior. In this chapter, Paul emphasizes the transformation of believers' minds and hearts through faith in Christ. He encourages them to live in a way that reflects the love and grace they have received from God. Romans 12 covers various aspects of Christian living, including humility, love, service, and using one's spiritual gifts for the benefit of the Christian community.

One of the well-known passages from Romans 12 is verses 1-2. Verse 1 urges believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God. This signifies the importance of surrendering one's entire being to God and dedicating oneself to His service. Verse 2 emphasizes the transformation that comes from the renewal of the mind. Christians are encouraged to adopt a mindset that aligns with God's will rather than conforming to worldly patterns.

J.B. Phillips has a memorable translation of Romans 12:1-2:

*With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give Him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the Plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.*

Romans 12 also discusses the concept of the body of Christ, emphasizing the unity and diversity within the community of believers. Paul provides practical guidance on how Christians should relate to one another and to the broader society.

Overall, Romans 12 is a key chapter that provides foundational principles for Christian living and ethical conduct based on the teachings of the Apostle Paul.

## **Lesson in Depth**

### **I. The Unifying Power of Humility (Romans 12:3)**

**To every one of you:** Paul will soon speak about how we should exercise spiritual gifts in the body of Christ, but a warning about humility is in order, given the inordinate pride that often arises from those who regard themselves as spiritually gifted.

We should remember that spiritual *giftedness* does not equal spiritual *maturity*. Just because a person has substantial spiritual gifts does not mean they are necessarily spiritually mature or a worthy example.

The righteousness of God will cause the believer to conduct himself in humility in the local church. Paul meets two dangers that the individual faced in the exercise of his spiritual gifts. He might overestimate himself and try to exercise a gift God never gave him. Or he might underestimate himself and fail to exercise the gift God has given to him. Paul shows that God has given each believer specific gifts to enable him to do what God wants him to do. No one is excluded.

The grace and the divine, undeserved favor that called Paul to be an apostle and gave him spiritual authority, also gave him sincere humility.

**Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think:** Paul does not tell the believer to take an attitude that finds pleasure in humiliation or degradation. Rather, the idea is that we should see the truth about ourselves and live in light of it. When we see ourselves as we really are, it is impossible to be given over to pride.

To **think soberly** is the exercise of sound judgment, which will lead believers to recognize that in themselves they are nothing and will yield the fruit of humility.

**God has dealt to each one a measure of faith:** This means that we should see even our saving faith as a gift from God, and that we have no basis for pride or a superior opinion of ourselves.

The “measure” of faith is the correct proportion of the spiritual gift or supernatural endowment and ability the Holy Spirit gives each believer so he may fulfill his role in the body of Christ. “Faith” is not saving faith, but rather faithful stewardship, the kind and quantity required to use one’s own particular gift. Every believer receives the exact gift and resources he needs to fulfill his role in the body of Christ.

It seems so strange to some people how one person seems to have more faith than the other, if we have all received our measure of faith. The truth is that our faith grows as we use it and as we read the word of God.

1 Corinthians 12:7-9 *“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;” “To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;”*

## **II. The Unity of the Body of Christ (Romans 12:4-5)**

**Many members in one body:** The church is a unified whole (one body), yet we are distinct within that one body (individual members). In the body of Christ there is unity but not uniformity.

**Individually members of one another:** We err when we neglect either aspect; unity should never be promoted at the expense of individuality, and individuality should never diminish the church's essential unity in Christ; He is our common ground, we are one body in Christ.

Paul is describing how living sacrifices live. He has urged Christians—all who have received God's mercy because of their faith in Christ—to offer their everyday lives to God as an ongoing act of worship. Previous verses made clear that this will require transformation of our minds and perspective so that we can see and understand what God wants and be used by Him to get it done.

Now, though, Paul begins to get into what our specific jobs in this sacrificial lifestyle might be. It turns out that God's purpose for Christians is that we will spend our lives serving each other in specific ways. His analogy here applies broadly to each local congregation, but it also includes the worldwide church in general.

Paul uses the familiar analogy of a human body, something he develops in more detail in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. Bodies are a unified whole, containing one person. But that unified body is made up of many different parts that serve wildly different functions from head to toe. Paul will show in the following verses that the church, meaning all Christians, is similar in that we are the body of Christ.

He describes how Christians who have been shown mercy by God—which means all saved believers—should live now. What kind of life makes sense? The prior verse described a human body. It is just one person, but it has many different parts that serve different functions.

Paul continues by saying that we, as the collective group of Christians, are also a kind of body. We are Christ's body on earth, often referred to as “the church.” We are countless different parts in many different places with vastly different jobs, but together we are, by analogy, one unified “being,” a single entity with what should be a united purpose. None of us exists outside of the body. No Christian is an unattached Christian. We are all members of each other, connected to each other with the purpose of serving each other. This is what God intends to do with us on this side of eternity.

### **III. Different Gifts According to the Grace of God (Romans 12:6-7)**

**Having then gifts:** The difference and distribution of gifts is all due to **the grace that is given to us**. Spiritual gifts are not given on the basis of merit, but because God chooses to give them.

This idea is related in the ancient Greek word for “spiritual gifts”: *charismata*, which means a gift of grace. This term was apparently coined by Paul to emphasize that the giving of these spiritual gifts was all of grace.

Spiritual gifts are given at the discretion of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:11 says, *But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.*

iii. Knowing this should be an insurmountable barrier to pride in the exercise of spiritual gifts. However, man, in the depravity of his heart, finds a way to be proud about spiritual gifts and insists on exalting men for how God has gifted them.

**If prophecy:** **Prophecy** must be practiced **in proportion to our faith**. God may give us something to say to an individual or church body that stretches our faith. If we can't prophecy in faith and trust that God has really spoken to us, we shouldn't do it at all.

We are reminded that **prophecy**, in the Biblical understanding, isn't necessarily “fore-telling” in a strictly predictive sense. It is more accurately “forth-telling” the heart and mind of God, which may or may not include a predictive aspect.

This warns us against flippant, “stream of consciousness” prophecy that has no difficulty saying, “Thus says the Lord” at the drop of a hat.

**In proportion to our faith:** The ancient Greek text actually has “the” before **faith**. Paul may be cautioning that prophecy must be *according to the faith*, in accord with the accepted body of doctrine held among believers.

Some take the **proportion** of **faith** to be the proportion of the faith of the audience of the prophecy; this has truth also.

**Ministry:** This has in view the broader picture of simply serving in practical ways. Paul sees this as an important ministry from the Holy Spirit as well.

**Teaching:** This has in mind *instruction*, while **exhortation** encourages people to practice what they have been taught; both are necessary for a healthy Christian life.

Those who are taught but not exhorted become “fat sheep” that only take in and never live the Christian life. Those who are exhorted but not taught become excited and active, but have no depth or understanding of what they do and will burn out quickly or will work in wrong ways.

#### IV. Gifts that Enrich the Body of Christ (Romans 12:8)

**If it is to encourage, then give encouragement:** The gift of exhortation, or encouragement, is the Spirit-enabled ability to build someone up by challenging him or her to do better. This passage includes strong exhortation from Paul himself. The church needs exhorters to keep all of us on the right path and moving forward.

**He who gives:** This refers to someone who is a channel through whom God provides resources for His body. This is an important *spiritual* gift that must be exercised with **liberality**. When someone who is called and gifted to be a giver stops giving liberally, they will often see their resources dry up – having forgotten *why* God has blessed them.

**He who leads:** Paul lists leadership as a separate gift from teaching, though often in the church we expect the same person to have both gifts. This often isn't the case. Sometimes called the gift of administration, this is the supernatural ability to call others to follow in the best direction for the group. Paul urges those with this gift to use it with zeal or enthusiasm. Spirit-gifted leaders help to set the energy level for the entire group. This one must show **diligence**. It is easy for leaders to become discouraged and feel like giving up, but they must persevere if they will please God by their leadership.

**He who shows mercy:** Finally, Paul lists the gift of mercy. This is a powerful gift when exercised in the Holy Spirit. It involves the ability to reflect the mercy God has shown to us on a personal level. Someone with the gift of mercy does not express to others that their wrong choices are okay, but that they are forgiven and accepted in Christ. Another view of this gift is that it involves ministering to the less fortunate. In either case, Paul urges this gift to be exercised with genuine cheerfulness.

#### Lesson Summary

Romans 12:3–8 describes the first responsibility of every living-sacrifice Christian who worships the Lord. The church is like a body: Christ's body. Each Christian has a part to play using the specific spiritual gifts God has given to us. These gifts of grace provide all the power and ability we need to serve each other, but we must still do it, whether our gift is service, teaching, exhortation, mercy, or something else.

The lessons we learn from this passage are:

1. **Humility:** Verse 3 cautions against pride and encourages humility. Believers are reminded not to think of themselves more highly than they ought but to have a sober judgment.
2. **Unity in Diversity:** Verses 4-5 highlight the concept of the body of Christ, emphasizing the unity and diversity within the Christian community. Each believer has different gifts, and together they form one body, supporting and complementing each other.

3. **Service and Use of Spiritual Gifts:** Verses 6-8 discuss the diversity of spiritual gifts within the body of Christ. Believers are encouraged to use their gifts for the benefit of the community. Some may have the gift of prophecy, others of service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, or mercy.
4. **Genuine Love:** The overall theme of the passage underscores the importance of genuine love. Christians are called to love sincerely, with actions that reflect the sacrificial love demonstrated by Christ.
5. **A Transformed Lifestyle:** The passage underscores the idea that genuine faith leads to a transformed lifestyle. The Christian life is not just about beliefs but also about practical living that reflects the character of Christ.

In summary, Romans 12:3-8 teaches believers about the importance of surrender, humility, unity, diversity, service, love, and the practical outworking of faith in everyday life. It provides a roadmap for Christian living that is rooted in a deep relationship with God and a commitment to living out His principles.