

Romans 12:3-5 (NKJV)

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,

5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

In verses 1 and 2 of Chapter 12, Paul is addressing **individuals**. He is telling **us, who live inside our skin**, how to approach **living for God** internally. The truth is that we exist as **individual** human beings. Most humans are not physically attached to other humans. And even when they are, they are individuals with individual spirits and souls. We are not corporate in that sense. So Paul starts at that point telling us how to flesh out this wonderful salvation that we have been given. And we start in our minds, in **our regard**, in **our believing** and **behaving accordingly**.

But Paul doesn't stay there long. Why? Because he knows that Christians are not in this alone. Most of the time, believers are saved **in the context of a body**. And that body is vitally important to the perseverance of the saints. It is crucial to God's will. So Paul jumps immediately into that conversation.

The Christian life is more than just Jesus and me. It is even more than Jesus and my blood relations. It is about Jesus and all of **HIS** brothers and sisters that He brings together in a body of believers. I have known a lot of people who have never moved beyond verses one and two. They take a very individualistic approach. They evaluate churches based on "what they can give me"- in other words, what's in it for me? When a church does something that goes against their tastes or preferences, they move to another church. These people tend to be causes of disruption to true body life. They usually regard themselves as more useful to the body than they truly are. And they simply will not commit to a body for the good of the cause of Christ no matter what the price.

There are also people in local gatherings of the Body of Christ who are not really shopping, because they have no intentions of leaving. But they are so distracted by their own lives that they never really contribute to the Body of Christ. They soak up resources of people's time and concern, but they rarely reciprocate, they rarely exercise the gift they have been given for another's good.

Paul would have none of this attitude. And he certainly said nothing that would **foster** such an attitude.

Let's look at our verse now.

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

We begin with the word "**For**" which leads us to understand that verses 1 and 2 connect to verse 3. We go from what our attitude must be toward our lives, our thoughts, and the world, to how we must **see ourselves** in light of other brothers and sisters.

through the grace given to me-

Now Paul could have said, I who have authority because I am an apostle, (something that none of you, my listeners, are by the way), am telling you this statement. And **because I am an apostle** you had better well listen to me because I carry the authority of God behind me.

That would have warmed them right up to his instructions wouldn't it? But he could have said it and it would have been true.

I think Paul serves here as an example of how to use authority. He has it. And he is using it. But look how he phrases it. Look at his attitude.

First- Paul emphasizes that this right is not something he earned. He did not pass the Apostle Seminary school, get a degree, and now he can talk down to those who have not attained such a position. No. He says he received this right to speak, he received his position, as a gift. It was given to him. He was actually in the process of tracking down and killing Christians when the gift came to him. Not exactly a career path we would be expected to follow.

Then notice he uses the word GRACE. When you hear the word grace, what does it instantly convey to you. (Now to Grace Frantz this may have more meanings than to the rest of us.) But for the rest of us, what does it convey? Doesn't it immediately make you think of **that which you got that you couldn't possibly deserve**? Well it should. That is what it means. So Paul immediately emphasizes what he and his audience have in common. He emphasizes that we are in this together. Paul was given a position he did not deserve, along with a salvation that he could not deserve. His listeners would be "right there" with him.

I think we can learn a little from this already. How do we use the authority that we have. Do we play the authority card every time we want to force people to do things that we think need done? Or do we appeal to faith and reason and only use the card when we need to? Now I am not talking about small children. They

understand pain and pleasure and we must use that to accomplish their upbringing. But when kids reach a certain age our job is to teach them to learn how to live, how to think, how to make good decisions, how to face the world. That job cannot be accomplished with simple commands or uninvolved lectures. We usually accomplish that with conversations and discussions in the framework of logical consequences. Commands have their place. Playing the authority card has its place. But we do those under our authority no favors if we do not teach them how to best perform the duties of life by understanding the end goal and owning it for themselves.

Paul used language that brought his audience in, that made him **one of them** rather than **one over them**.

So the audience would have understood that Paul is referring to the fact that he had authority, and that this authority had a source other than himself. And they would know that what he would next say came from that source. So he moves on to saying that which he had to say.

to everyone who is among you

Now, what is Paul going to be talking about in this text? He will talk about gifts. So he is essentially addressing everyone who has a gift and everyone who needs to think properly about those gifts. And who is that? Everyone.

Isn't it good to know that we all have gifts, we all have useful niches, we all have scopes of service. There is no one in the body of believers meant to live only to themselves. There is no one who has no use toward other believers. Everyone has a gift and everyone has significance. No one is left out of this conversation. Everyone must know how to regard their own gift and how to regard the gifts of others.

not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

So Paul is answering the question, **how should we think about ourselves** in relation to others who are in the church?

So far we have looked at the will of God for each person in how it is similar. **It is the will of God** for each believer to present their bodies as living sacrifices. **It is the will of God** for each believer to stop conforming to the world's conforming pressures. **It is the will of God** for each believer to be transformed by thinking true thoughts instead of lies.

Now Paul moves into how the will of God is different for each believer. The will of God for each believer's service is as individual as they are. It is not uniform. It is

not expected to be uniform. That's why programs in the church are often more of a hindrance than a help. Not everyone needs to do door to door evangelism. Not everyone needs to publicly preach or teach. Not everyone needs to be a Sunday School teacher. Not everyone needs to account for the use of church funds. But we all need to serve Christ in the way the He has gifted us to serve Him. So the first thing that Paul tells us is how we **should not think** about ourselves in regard to others.

not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think

Isn't this always the first problem. Self centeredness. We want to see the world as if we are the center of it. We want to compare ourselves to ourselves and use ourselves as the standard of how people ought to be. Pride will always elevate self and belittle everyone else. And we cannot bring this into the church. We cannot allow this to happen in our thinking. Here Paul is already giving us an example of the things we need to renew in our thinking. And notice that the issue is thinking. The problem is thinking. And we start with something **we are not to think**, a way in which the world shows itself in our thinking. We need to avoid it, stop it.

The word for highly means hyper, excess, something that is too high. Do you know what humility is? Humility is not thinking **lowly** of ourselves. Humility is actually viewing ourselves **accurately**, seeing ourselves exactly as we are. That is what is called for.

Notice here there is a way that **we should** think of ourselves and a way that **we shouldn't**. We **cannot help** thinking about ourselves. We live in our skin. We are self aware. We need to gauge how we are doing, how we are living. It is unavoidable. And it is ok. But it is important **HOW** we view ourselves. The way that we **shouldn't** is to make ourselves the standard.

Suppose I were to be a person that is very committed to visiting anyone who is in the hospital. (I chose this example because I am not that kind of person.) It would be very easy for me to think that I was superior to anyone **who did not** visit people in the hospital. It would be very easy for me to think that other people should visit people in the hospital. It would be very easy to think that other people are sinning or failing if they do not do the things I do. That is a good example of thinking too highly of myself.

Now there is an "ought" here and we will get to this later. There is a way to think and a way not to think. There is an "ought not" and an "ought".

but to think soberly

What is soberly? If it means to think while not being drunk with alcohol that would be an easy command to obey. But that is not the essence of it. It means to be in one's right mind. This gives us even more insight into those who are high minded or thinking too highly of themselves. They are **not** in their right mind. They are not thinking clearly or objectively. They are not thinking sanely. They are thinking from a self-absorbed perspective. We are to clearly think from another perspective, a higher perspective, God's perspective. We are to view ourselves from the perspective of **who we are**, not from **who we would like ourselves to be**. And if we are sober we will buy into what God says about us. He called us to Himself by Grace- not merit. It was not something about us that caused God to save us. It was something about God. That is clear mindedness. That is sanity. That is truth. And that is the perspective that God calls us to. That is what we must **reorient to** in our minds to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. **Sober thinking is realistic thinking**, truthful thinking, humble thinking. That is what we are called to.

You will find in scripture multiple passages about boasting. And none of them are good. We are told over and over that we are not to boast, we have no reasons to boast, we are foolish to boast. Because everything good that we have we did not earn but we were given by God's grace.

So how should we think about ourselves? When we look in the mirror, how should we evaluate that person? How should we regard him or her?

as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Now, this is how we should view ourselves. Now we need to notice that this is not telling us how we should **all view ourselves the same**, but how we should all **view ourselves individually**. Some would say that this measure of faith is talking about how we are all together in the same faith. But that doesn't seem to be what the text is talking about. It looks more like this measure of faith is what is different about us.

The word for dealt is "divided". So God is dividing out this measure of faith. Now what does it mean? How has God dealt to each one a measure of faith? And what is that measure of faith.

Given the context it appears that Paul is talking about the gift itself that is received by faith.

Ephesians 4:7-13 (NKJV)

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.....

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

I think it might be that the measure of faith is actually the gift received by the grace of God. God gives out the gifts exactly as He sees fit. It isn't **our faith** that determines what we receive. But it is God **who gives the gift** and it is through **the faith that we receive from God** that we **receive His gift**.

Now I think it is worthy to note that we don't receive the gift **according to our faith**. God gives the gifts totally based on what He desires to do. So those who emphasize you must exercise your faith in order to receive a gift are missing the point. These gifts are not distributed based on the degree of our faith. That is not what this says. It says that God has granted a measure of faith which may be a synonym for the gift that He has given us.

1 Corinthians 12:11 (NKJV)

11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Now these gifts that God gives us vary. They vary in character. They vary in kind. They vary in importance. And that is all ok with God. God is doing this as he sees fit. We can't think wrongly about this. We have got to align ourselves with how God sees this.

We learned from Romans 1 and 2 that all believers have a common commission to serve Christ. But we will see as we go forward in our text that we have a lot of different gifts. We are to work with a unity in the Gospel message, a unity in our commitment to Christ, but a huge diversity in the gifts we are called to exercise, a huge difference in the service we are called to provide. Paul makes it clear that God wants us to understand that we are all to come to Christ with the same attitude, that we are all to submit ourselves as living sacrifices, God is going to use us in different ways, unique ways, with distinctly different gifts.

When we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, God has a very practical use for us. He has activity for us to do. There are things He wants done that He has equipped us to do. We can't present ourselves as a living sacrifice and not be used. And at the same time we cannot be used if we have not first offered our bodies as living sacrifices.

We find all through scripture that service to God honors God. He wants it. It glorifies Him. But that is only true when the service comes from a heart that is submitted to Him, devoted to Him, presented to Him. That kind of commitment produces ministry.

Now, notice that we are to view ourselves as God has given us faith or given us this ministry that is done by faith. We know that these gifts are varied. We know they look different, they act different, they are used differently. But the thing underneath all of this is that we are all **compelled** to use the gifts that we are given. This is not an option. It is an obligation.

That means that even if you look at your gift and it might seem inferior to someone else's, we must still exercise that gift by faith. We have no right to refuse out of pride or any other reason.

We all have a function in the body of Christ. He put us in the body for a specific function. We can't wimp out. We can't say no. We are called to that service.

Now we might say, but I don't know what my gift is. I don't know what that measure of faith is. I would suggest that we know so little about the gifts because we know so little of presenting our bodies as living sacrifices. We know so little of choosing not to conform to the world. We know so little of taking our thoughts captive and renewing our minds. It is only as we do those things that we will understand God's will and also our giftedness.

I'd like to read something from John McArthur.

God does not give His children gifts without letting them know what those gifts are. Therefore, if we are not sure of our gifts from God, it is most likely because we are not close to God. We come to know our gifts more fully as, through worship in spiritual truth, we come to know Him more fully. When our lives are on the altar of sacrifice, we will have no problem discovering or using our spiritual gifts. They cannot be recognized except as we use them. When a believer walks in holy obedience to the Lord, filled with the Holy Spirit and serving God, it will become apparent to him and to others what his gift is and how it blesses the body of Christ.

It is estimated that even the brightest people use only about eleven percent of their brain capacity—leaving nearly ninety percent unused. A similar ratio probably applies to most Christians' use of their spiritual gifts. When a believer has trouble understanding how the gifts mentioned in Romans 12:6-8 apply to him personally, it is not because he cannot figure out what his gift is but

because he has not come to terms with the dedication and requirements of the preceding five verses. And, on the other hand, when a believer is used powerfully in the Lord's work, it is not because he has perfectly understood and analyzed his gift, but rather because his life is "a living and holy sacrifice," which is "acceptable to God" as a "spiritual service of worship" (v. 1), and God's Spirit is moving through him in serving power.

How about us? Do we know what the gift is that God has blessed us with? How have you blessed others? How has God used you in their lives? Is it something that cannot be explained through worldly natural explanations? Is it something that only could be explained by the power of God? That is how a spiritual gift works.

Is it possible that God would do far more work in our church if we would submit to verses 1 and 2 very intentionally? Is it possible that our gifts have not been conformed because we have been living for ourselves and not living for Christ? Is it possible that our church could be used in God's work in a much more dramatic way if we would just say "Yes Lord" to verses 1 and 2?

I would like to challenge us all to an experiment. Each day this week intentionally do something for someone outside of your family in the body of Christ. Write a letter. Call them up. Invite them over. Message them. But pray about it each day and then do that thing. Watch how God uses it. If anyone responds, listen to what they say. It is likely an indication about the gift that God has given you.

I have said this often and I will continue to say it. It is more blessed to give than to receive. We rarely get depressed about our lack of opportunity **to serve others**. We get depressed when we analyze how **others** view us or when **we view ourselves** as being worthless. That is not what God intends for our lives. The cure sometimes comes when we get off our butts and obey. God intends that we exercise our gifts. And as we do that we begin to experience our usefulness. We begin to cause people to depend upon us. We see how we are needed. And while we can even view that as a nuisance, it should really be a joy to us. It means that we have a place. We have significance in the plan of God. We have things to do that will please God and will help God's people. Much of our despair in 2013 is a result of the fact that we would rather get than give. We are so hesitant to lay down our lives for the good of others. We are so hesitant to leave our comfort zones and reach out to the needs. So I challenge you this week, especially if you are feeling low, to carry out our little experiment and see what God will do through you.