

Sermons through

# Romans

## One Body In Christ

*Romans 12:3-8*

*Part One*

*Sober Up*

*With Study Questions*

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Sober Up

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. <sup>4</sup> For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, *being many*, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. <sup>6</sup> Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> or ministry, *let us use it in our ministering*; he who teaches, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Romans 12:3-8).

## Introduction

One of the greatest gifts my wife and I receive at parents is observing a genuine love and fellowship between our children. Sometimes, after we've gone to bed, we'll hear our children talking to each other in the kitchen – just having a chat. On occasion I'll look out the back window to see my two sons playing volleyball or basketball in the back yard or my two daughters just sitting in one of their bedrooms talking and laughing.

One of the greatest gifts I receive as a pastor is observing members of our church loving one another, fellowshiping with one another, helping and encouraging one another. So often these are things not initiated through a planned program of the church. A few years ago my wife went to lunch and saw a dozen or so of the elderly women in church having lunch together – apparently it had become a regular event.

I'll hear about members who have helped other members with a difficult project or putting together a financial budget or providing transportation or just visiting them through a difficult season. There have been times when members have moved to other states and have either undergone a hardship, an illness or a death – or a blessing, a wedding or a

new home, and I'll hear that they have been visited. Sometimes they'll visit just because they miss them.

It makes me wonder how much of this is going on that I don't even know about. I am sure there are still people and events that fall through our fingers. There is that moment when I'm asked about the welfare of a member and I honestly can't give an up-to-date answer or there is an event designed for fellowship, service, instruction or outreach with an unreasonably small turnout and it makes me wonder if we're another 80/20 church (where 20% of the church does 80% of the ministry).

We can always be better in the "one anothers" of Scripture—love one another, pray for one another, live in harmony with one another, serve one another, etc. God has provided every individual in the church with an attribute, a skill, a gift designed for the mutual edification of the saints (1 Corinthians 14:26). These gifts are spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4 and Romans 12.

The current instruction regarding gifts follows the Apostle's exhortation to be transformed by the renewing of our minds—to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. So if one were to ask, 'In what venue am I called to be a living sacrifice? Can you give me a practical example—an application, that I might begin to live out your exhortation?'

In the remaining chapters of Romans the Apostle will give instructions regarding our sacrificial interaction with the world, the government, the weaker brethren, etc. But he begins with an attitude—a disposition which must govern these interactions and he begins with a setting—the body of Christ as it is expressed in local churches. Certainly there is application to all of this within the wider church—the universal church. But reading the whole of Romans (and other epistles) one cannot miss Paul's ministerial concern that that particular church begin to apply these lessons at the most local level.

**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 (Romans 12:3).**

## Sufficient Grace

Paul begins this section with a brief appeal to his own apostolic authority. He is speaking **“through the grace given to me (him)”** *dia ho charis ho dotheises*.

*First* we might note that this is an authoritative message. He is not merely offering tips or his own subjective opinion. Paul is responding to his apostolic marching orders. He had...

**...received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations (Romans 1:5).**

The Apostle Paul is fulfilling the Great Commission. In light of the authority of Christ, he is making disciples of all nations and teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded. In a world where everyone is telling us what to do, what to believe, what to think and who to trust, Paul is elevating Christ as the Sacrificial King who is to be trusted with our eternal souls and our daily decisions.

*Secondly*, Paul had firsthand experience on what it meant to be an object of God’s grace. Paul did not (nor should we, as we shall see in the verses to follow) view the grace of God as a license for lethargy or a springboard for pride. It was quite the opposite.

**But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me (1 Corinthians 15:10).**

True grace produces both hard work as well as humility. We see in Paul’s words a warning against pride – especially in the exercise of our ministerial pursuits. He knew intimately how painfully this particular attribute is generally acquired.

It is a simple sentence for us **“through the grace given to me”** but for Paul one wonders what it conjured up in his thinking – his own testimony of the grace given to him. Having been **“caught up”** into heaven and hearing that **“things that cannot be told, what man may not utter”** there

was apparently a great temptation to become “**conceited**” *hyperairomai* (lifted beyond one’s appropriate station).

This conceit can be so powerful that God employed the devil himself (or at least a messenger of Satan) to so “**harass**” *kolaphize* (to knock about – to beat with a fist)<sup>1</sup> Paul that his responses seemed to be narrowed down to a state of weakness and humility, his only comfort being the knowledge that God’s “**grace was sufficient**” for him (2 Corinthians 12:1-10).

I am not speaking here (I truly pray) as someone who by any stretch of the imagination is content in my own humility, but I am horrified when reflecting on the words and actions that I thought were appropriate as a young Christian and a younger pastor. And the lessons by which my own arrogance has been (and still is) addressed are painful lessons.

**For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).**

I recall (well over twenty years ago) a lunch I had with two women in the church who had questions regarding the theological direction our church was taking. One of the women was quite aggressive as I recollect. I can remember my thinking as she so forcefully offered her criticisms. I thought of a basketball game where your opponent sets the boundaries of contact by certain levels of pushing and elbowing. I thought that she must be comfortable with aggressive discourse so I accommodated her. She was highly and unnecessarily offended. I didn’t have to speak that way. She was hurt. She and her family eventually left the church. I could have been gentler. That is one of many stories.

And at the risk of sounding judgmental, I find it disquieting when interacting with Christians in position of leadership (sometimes self-appointed leadership) so governed by prestige, arrogance and insecurity, which is its own form of pride. Perhaps Paul is seeking to rescue his readers from his own painful lessons.

And “his readers” are meant to include everyone – “**to everyone who is among you.**” The instruction is directed at everyone who is seeking to minister (which, as we shall see, includes everyone). Whether you are a

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<sup>1</sup> **20.27** *κολαφίζω*<sup>b</sup>: (a figurative extension of meaning of *κολαφίζω* ‘to beat with the fist,’ 19.7) to cause injury or weakness or possibly a circumstantial difficulty—‘to cause harm to.’<sup>1</sup>

pastor, elder, deacon, worship leader, usher – whether you organize the potlucks, the picnics, bulletins, retreats, youth group or Sunday school – whether your service is a recognized ministry of the church or something you do privately in your love and care for a single other person, the lesson is for you. And the disposition that we are warned against is a beast.

There may be nothing as dangerous as a member of the covenant community who has grown bitter in their call to service. One thinks of Cain, and God’s disregard for his faithless offering, how he became angry and his “face fell”; then came the warning:

**The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? <sup>7</sup>If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it (Genesis 4:6, 7)”**

Sin is crouching at the door. It has been compared to a lion in the thicket, waiting to pounce. It has sunk its fangs into many ministries and ruined many churches. So much can be achieved or avoided if we manage to take to heart these next words:

**...not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.**

## **Sober Up**

As many of you know, I have recently been involved in seeking to help another local church who has gone through a series of difficulties. One of the most encouraging comments I have heard in this whole process is when one of the pastors, almost as if he had been extraordinarily ministered to by this particular attribute, told me that he appreciated how normal I was. How much insanity does one have to be surrounded by in order for “normal” or “average” to be a compliment!

It’s been said:

**Pride is a species of insanity; but humility betokens a return to a sane mind: and a humble estimate of ourselves, as**

**Professor Hodge observes, is the only sound, sane, and right estimate. – Ed.<sup>2</sup>**

So often our aggressive, and even vindictive response to having been sinned against contains the thought, if not the words, “This should not have happened to me.” High thoughts of self is pandemic – not merely through the world but in the church as well.

There is a bit of a play on words here that is not as evident in English as in Greek. We are not to be high-minded *hyperphronein* (think more highly or beyond oneself) but sober-minded *sophroneo*. In an effort to make the sentence read smoothly the translators wrote “**not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.**” But a more literal translation might read, “**not to be high-minded above what he ought to be minded, but so to be minded as to be sober-minded.**”<sup>3</sup>

To be sober-minded simply means “**to have understanding about practical matters and thus be able to act sensibly – ‘to have sound judgment, to be sensible, to use good sense, sound judgment.’**”<sup>4</sup> This sounds so easy yet there is such a shortage.

**It is not good to eat much honey, nor is it glorious to seek one’s own glory (Proverbs 25:27).**

We finish this section with Paul’s reasonable call to be humble and sober mind – especially in the areas of ministry and gifts. It is because...

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

**God Has Dealt**

This will be dealt with more full in verse 6, suffice it to say for now that the call of humility and sober-mindedness makes all the sense in the

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed.). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

<sup>3</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 252). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 383). New York: United Bible Societies.

world when one comes to realize that whatever wonderful gift they have to offer others is itself a gift from God.

**But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men" (Ephesians 4:7, 8).**

Of course, this is true of everything.

**John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (John 3:27).**

When our children go to birthday parties, we send them with a gift to give their friend. Small children have no means to purchase gifts (and often have no inclination), but we recognize that it is a nice thing to do. We also hope they enjoy giving the gift. We hope they learn, as Jesus Himself said **"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).**

But we also recognize that there is something amiss if they fail to recognize that they did not pay for the gift. Our children should enjoy both giving the gift and freely getting the gift that they are giving to someone else. Jesus' instruction to His apostles was that they **"received without paying; give without pay" (Matthew 10:8).**

We have graciously been given gifts, the expressed design of which is that we graciously give those gifts to others – sort of a re-gifting. We are to do this faithfully, with humility of heart.



## Questions for Study

1. Why is it a joy to see love and fellowship among the saints (pages 2, 3)?
2. How do the first two verses of Romans 12 interact with verses 3-8 (page 3)?
3. What two points can we take away from the Apostle Paul's appeal to his apostolic authority, specifically the "grace given to (him)" (page 4, 5)?
4. To whom do the words written by the Apostle apply? How is the disposition he is warning against so dangerous (pages 5, 6)?
5. What does it mean to be sober-minded? Why is this such a reasonable command (pages 6-8)?