

## Rom 12:3-8 Gifts for the Church

All through the book of Romans, we've been talking about salvation by grace through faith, that no one deserves God's favor shown to us in salvation. Whether Jew or Greek, rich or poor, slave or free, we all come equally as sinners before a holy God, and rely on His grace to forgive our sins. Paul reminds us once again that we ought not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought, but "to think with sober judgment."

There are a number of reasons we could apply to this admonition. First, because apart from Christ, we are all guilty sinners. Whatever claims we might have for pride, prestige, or power on the world's stage, before God we have nothing to boast of. Secondly, and this is where the context takes us, we are part of something bigger and more important than ourselves, and God is in charge of it all. We ought to think soberly because of the high responsibility we have toward God for our lives.

Paul uses an interesting phrase regarding our thought life – "each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." First of all, we find here that God is the author of faith – He gives it to us, which takes away any ground of boasting we might have thought to have. Not only does He give us the ability to believe, but it says here that God assigns, apportions, deals out, various amounts and kinds of faith, according to His own wisdom and pleasure. Why is this important for us to understand? Because not only does faith bring us into the realm of salvation, receiving His eternal forgiveness and blessing, but it also brings us into the body of Christ and gives us a role to fulfill in that body.

"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." We can easily understand the body metaphor – to have a complete body, we need hands, fingers, organs, legs, ears, eyes, etc. To miss any one part, or to have one that does not function properly, causes hardship on the rest of the body. Paul made this very same point in 1 Cor 12:12-14 and Eph 4:4,15,16. Let's read those passages before going on to what he says here.

1 Cor 12:12-14 "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many." He goes on to talk about the foolishness of one body part thinking it was independent of the body.

Eph 4:4 "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call...(v. 15-16) Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

One body, one Spirit, under one head – Christ. We all need to submit to His headship so we can function according as He has called us, so that He is glorified and the whole is able to function properly. Now, back to what Paul was saying in Rom 12 about being members of the body, and thinking about ourselves according to the measure of faith that God has assigned us.

Verse 6 says we each have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. The Greek word is *charismata* – a gift given by grace (undeserved). He also specifies that we each have our own gift that God has given. We are all different, because He has called us to be like various parts of the body.

What are these gifts? He lists them for us: prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, contributing, leading, giving mercy. I don't think this list is all-comprehensive, because when we look at similar passages such as 1 Cor 12, Eph 4 and 1 Pet 4, there are others included. A key element for us to recognize here is that God has given us gifts of faith in order to serve Him, and to serve the rest of the body of Christ. Too often we think that we are to be served, but that is not the way Jesus planned it. He said of Himself "I am among you as one who serves." If our Lord and Master serves for our benefit, should we not follow that same example for others?

Now, the specific gifts he mentions here each have a specific role for the rest of the body. Prophesying means to communicate God's message, to strengthen, encourage, and comfort others. The one who does that is to do it "in right relation to the faith" – according to the body of truth that has already been revealed through the Word of God. The other gifts – serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing, leading, showing mercy are all to be done willingly, generously, lovingly, for the sake of the well-being and growth of the body of Christ.