

“Christian Body Building” (Romans 12:3–8)

“What is God’s will for my life?” Have you ever asked that question? If you’re like me you’ve asked that question a number of times in the course of your life. As a follower of Christ, the subject of God’s will is significant because you yearn to please God. But there is a secondary reason the subject of God’s will is so crucial: many people lack purpose in their lives. Psychologists have long admitted that one of the great problems men and women face is a feeling of emptiness and aimlessness. We need to feel that life has purpose and that we are, to some extent, reaching that goal. Unfortunately, you may not be living a meaningful life. You may be so caught up in the busyness of life that you miss the fullness of life. Yet, at the core of your being you long to know and apply God’s will. Therefore, if you are to satisfy the soul’s quest to know and apply God’s will, you must listen to Paul as he lays out some specifics.

In Rom 12:1–2 Paul calls believers to experience ongoing spiritual transformation. This transformation begins by presenting our bodies and renewing our minds. Most people stop reading with 12:2 because these two verses are so familiar. But 12:3 begins with “for” (*gar*), which is a connecting word signifying that Paul has more to say about transformation.¹ What he says in 12:3–8 is that our commitment to worship and seeking God’s will is incomplete until we are ready to serve.² In other words, if your worship does not lead to service, then you haven’t finished worshipping yet. To put it simply: *True worship results in service*. Paul shares three results of Christian transformation that will enable us to live a transformed life and to apply God’s will.³

1. Christian transformation produces humility (12:3). How you think about yourself in relationship to the church is critical. Thus, the main point of this entire paragraph is the command of 12:3.⁴ Paul writes: **“For through the grace given to me⁵ I say⁶ to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think;⁷ but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”** In this single verse, Paul uses one particular Greek word (and its compounds) four different times.⁸ It’s the word that is translated “think” (*phroneo*). A literal translation might read something like this: “Do not super-think [*hyperphroneo*] of yourself more highly than you ought to think [*phroneo*], but rather think [*phroneo*] of yourself with sober thinking [*sophroneo*].”⁹ Paul is obviously quite concerned that you and I think humbly about ourselves. What is humility? It is the recognition and application of who you are in Christ. The first thing Paul does is call attention to his own dependence on grace in the use of his apostolic gift (cf. 1:5).¹⁰ He is saying, “I could easily begin to think too highly of myself as an apostle were it not for one thing: *grace*. All my calling, all my gifts, all my authority is a work of God’s grace in my life. I don’t deserve it; I didn’t muster it up; it is all of grace.” We must continually remind ourselves of this simple truth: our lives consist of grace.¹¹ We are saved by grace; we grow by grace; and we are endowed by grace. We are what we are only by God’s grace.¹²

Paul commands “everyone” (*pas*) not to think too highly of himself or herself. The book of Romans was written to Jewish and Gentile believers who experienced tension over certain race and freedom issues. Their temptation was to think too highly of themselves. The problem of a big head is not unique to the church at Rome; every believer can struggle with pride.¹³ The remedy to this condition is thinking with “sound judgment” so that we do not get inflated egos and begin to think more highly of ourselves than we should. If we’re not careful, we can begin to think that the church is fortunate to have us and our gifts. Or, even worse, we can get the idea that service is beneath us that it is for other people who aren’t as important as we are. To possess “sound judgment” is to have “Christ-esteem,”¹⁴ not self-esteem. This entails recognizing who you are in Christ. We do so according to the “measure of faith” we have been given. This phrase does not refer to saving faith, but to a capacity to serve.¹⁵ Every Christian has been given grace that is designed to lead to God-honoring service in the church. But before we can serve effectively, there is a standard of thinking we must adopt in order to measure our service.

Tom Brokaw was wandering through Bloomingdales' New York store one day, shortly after earning a promotion to the co-host spot on the *Today Show*. Brokaw's new position was another peak in a rapidly rising career in television journalism after plodding faithfully up the ranks, first in Omaha, then for NBC in Los Angeles and Washington D. C. It wouldn't be lying to say he was feeling pretty good about himself. As he browsed through the store, he noticed a man watching him intensely. The man continued to stare, and finally, when the man approached him, Brokaw prepared himself to reap the first fruits of television stardom in New York. The man pointed at him and asked, "Tom Brokaw, right?" "Right," said Brokaw. "You used to do the morning news on KMTV in Omaha, right?" "That's right," said Brokaw, getting ready for the warm praises destined to follow. "I knew it the minute I spotted you," the fellow said. Then he paused and added, "Whatever happened to you?"

How can you avoid thinking too highly of yourself? Here are two suggestions:

- ***Humble yourself so that God doesn't have to humble you.*** You may believe you deserve the credit for what God has given you and what He is doing in and through you. Yet, you dare not take credit for grace, neither saving grace nor serving grace. Humble yourself on a daily basis so that God doesn't have to humble you (or worse yet humiliate you).¹⁶ He loves you too much to let you be arrogant.
- ***Recognize that you are fortunate to be a part of your local church.*** It is important to understand that you are not God's gift to your church. You must be reminded that it is not the church's blessing to have you. It's God's grace that let you in. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Winston Churchill said, "The cemeteries are filled with men who thought that they were indispensable." The church will go on with or without you . . . and will probably do even better when you're gone. Remember, *true worship results in service*. It is a privilege to serve!

[The first grace of Christian transformation is humility. Now we will discover the basis for this humility and the second grace of transformation.]

2. Christian transformation produces unity (12:4-5). Character transformation is seen especially in our relationship with other believers. Paul compares the physical body and the body of Christ to illustrate the importance of serving.¹⁷ He writes: "**For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**" Three observations jump out from these verses: (1) *Your body has many members*. The most visible and prominent gifts are not necessarily the most important gifts. Our vital organs are not visible. So too the vital members of the body of Christ may be the least visible.¹⁸ We must esteem all who are serving in our local church. (2) *Every member of the body is important*. How important is it that each member does his or her part? It's vitally important, because no two of us have exactly the same function. A non-serving saint is like an ear on the human body that decides it doesn't want to hear anything today, or a hand that decides it is done too much and it's going to take the day off. Let one of your ears or hands quit working, and your whole body will suffer. (3) *Every member of the body depends on other members*. You may have never thought about how utterly crucial the local church is to your life in Christ.¹⁹ Do you realize that in belonging to the body, we belong to each other? Connection with Christ means connection with each other. If one arm is bleeding badly, every limb in the body will grow weaker, not just the arm. If one arm is working hard to feed the mouth, every limb will be strengthened. Paul emphasizes the importance of unity amidst diversity. No part of the human body can do everything. This is equally true in the spiritual realm. You need the body because you don't possess all the spiritual gifts. Personally, I find believers who are gifted differently than me fascinating. I tend to respect these individuals in a far greater way than I would if I possessed their gifts.

Did you know you have cancer? You do! Instead of saying that someone “gets cancer,” cancer researchers now say that everyone “has cancer.” In other words, there are always cancerous cells among the body’s trillions of cells. Our health goal is to continually strengthen the body’s immune system—our God-given shield of protection—so that rogue cells can be overcome and eliminated, removing their opportunity to multiply and spread. We can apply the same strategy to maintain spiritual health: the spiritual body is only as healthy as its weakest part. Or, the local church is only as healthy as its weakest member. Physically and spiritually, we are on a lifelong quest to strengthen every cell of our body and every member of Christ’s body.²⁰

So how are you doing in your service? Let me put the question another way: Suppose that everyone in the church were like you, what kind of church would we have? Would we still be able to staff our ministries? Would we still support missionaries around the world? Would we still reach people for Jesus Christ? Let these questions sink into your soul. If it feels uncomfortable, perhaps the Holy Spirit wants you to do something about it. *True worship results in service.*

[Paul has shown that Christian transformation produces humility and unity. Now we will see how this all works together in a very practical way. The third and final result of Christian transformation is . . .]

3. Christian transformation produces ministry (12:6–8).²¹ It is the responsibility of every believer to use his or her spiritual gift in ministry.²² In 12:6a Paul writes, “**Since we have gifts [*charismata*] that differ according to the grace [*charis*] given to us,**²³ **each of us is to exercise them accordingly.**”²⁴ Paul says we all have different gifts.²⁵ Your gift is a God-given capacity to fulfill what He has asked you to accomplish. It is any aspect of your temperament, your position, or any ability given by God, experienced in an unusual measure, through which you are generally used by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of His people.²⁶ This gift helps you to locate your niche, your place, and your role. Interestingly, the Greek word for “gifts” is *charismata*,²⁷ from which we get the English word “charismatic.” Perhaps you shy away from this word. But it’s a good, biblical word that simply means “grace gift.” All of God’s gifts are “grace gifts.” In other words, none of the gifts come from within us, but all of them are given to us by God. In that sense, we’re all charismatic Christians! If you’ve got a spiritual gift (and all Christians have at least one gift), then you are a charismatic believer. Don’t let that thought scare you. Being charismatic in the biblical sense simply means that you have been given a spiritual gift by the Holy Spirit.²⁸

There are the three primary benefits to exercising your spiritual gift:²⁹ (1) *God will be glorified.*³⁰ Your spiritual gifts are ultimately designed to bring glory to God. This is your highest calling. (2) *Others will be edified.* Spiritual gifts are given to build up the body and lead her to maturity. If you fail to develop your gifts or let them decline through disuse, your fellow believers will be hurt because they will be deprived of the unique ministry that only you could perform in their lives. (3) *You will be satisfied.* Knowing and using your gifts will allow you to discover a significant part of your purpose for living. You will also have a sense of fulfillment and joy in serving others. I would go so far as to say that any Christian who is not a functioning, serving member of a local church is living outside of God’s will.³¹

Before we consider the seven gifts in 12:6b–8, a few quick comments are in order: (1) The expression “each of us is to exercise them accordingly” (12:6b NASB) is in italics. This means the phrase is not in the Greek text. Nonetheless, Paul isn’t just listing gifts; he is exhorting each member to put his or her gift to work (see the NET “he must . . .”).³² (2) Some of these gifts are manifested in the realm of speaking; others are evidenced in their service. But each of the gifts is significant. (3) This is not an exhaustive list; it is merely a sampling. There are other lists of spiritual gifts, which include different gifts, and there are several gifts in 12:6b–8 that are unique to this passage.³³

Below is a brief description of the seven gifts:

- 1) **Prophecy: “if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith.”**³⁴ Prophecy is the ability to receive and proclaim a message for God.³⁵ Prophecy has two dimensions: foretelling and forthtelling.³⁶ Prophecy has a revelatory basis while teaching is passing on the truth of the gospel.³⁷ Prophets are to exercise their gift in proportion to [their] faith, meaning according to the faith God has given them to use their gift properly (cf. 12:3).³⁸ Paul is saying that they must use their prophetic gift to serve God and the church rather than to serve themselves. He is not to speak beyond what God has revealed. He must be careful never to speak on his own authority or from his own resources.
- 2) **Serving: “if service, in his serving.”**³⁹ Serving is to provide practical help to meet the needs of others.⁴⁰ Elsewhere prophecy is the most prized gift (1 Cor 14:1) so I find it noteworthy that service follows prophecy. Paul may be suggesting that service is the esteemed behind the scenes gift that in many ways is on par with even prophecy. This makes sense, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).
- 3) **Teaching: “he who teaches, in his teaching.”** Teaching is to understand and communicate God’s Word in a clear and relevant manner. Teachers are not just pulpiteers; they are faithful men and women who teach children’s Sunday School, youth group, and small groups. Some of the best teachers in local churches are not those who preach on Sunday mornings. Rather, they teach in the trenches throughout the church. They may never receive the accolades and the respect of the pastor and staff, but they are strategic and significant members.
- 4) **Exhortation: “he who exhorts, in his exhortation.”** Exhortation is to encourage, comfort, confront, and instruct others. Exhortation focuses upon the application of truth to everyday life. The verb *parakaleo* was used in 12:1 when Paul wrote “I exhort [*parakaleo*] you brothers and sisters by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.”
- 5) **Giving: “he who gives, with liberality.”** Giving is to supply physical resources to help meet needs. The word translated “liberality” (*haplotēs*) actually means “simplicity” or “sincerity” (NET).⁴¹ In this respect, when one contributes it should be done in simplicity with no ulterior motives.⁴² The term could be translated “single-mindedly”—referring to the fact that they should give “as unto the Lord”—not for any earthly reward.
- 6) **Leadership: “he who leads, with diligence.”**⁴³ Leadership is to motivate, coordinate, and oversee others in ministry.⁴⁴ Leaders are called to exercise “diligence” because they are more prone to laziness than others simply because there may be no one exercising oversight of them. Thus, they may be able to skate by with less than zealous effort.⁴⁵
- 7) **Mercy: “he who shows mercy,⁴⁶ with cheerfulness.”**⁴⁷ Mercy is to perceive people’s hurts and gently and lovingly console them. This is the only occasion in the New Testament when the verb “mercy” (*eleeo*) is used of human beings. Since our God is a merciful God (cf. 12:1) His people must be merciful too. To show mercy is to care for anybody who is in need or in distress (e.g., aliens, orphans and widows) or the disabled, the sick and the dying. Moreover, mercy is not to be shown reluctantly or patronizingly, but cheerfully.⁴⁸ Instead of whining and griping about caring for those in need, we ought to do so with a smile on our face.

If you are presently serving in your local church, please consider the following principles:

Focus on your dominant spiritual gift. Don't try to be "all things to all people." Learn to say, "No." (Go ahead, say it aloud!) Instead of doing a number of ministries adequately or worse yet poorly, choose to do *one* ministry with excellence. In the long run it's always far better to "play to your strengths." Be realistic about your gift(s) and your ability to serve. Some Christians want to serve where they were never meant to serve. Consequently, they are trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. You must find the area of service that God has called you to serve in. When you are functioning in your gift, ministry will be a joy not a burden. So find your ministry niche and exploit it for God's glory and for the good of the body.

Seek to equip an apprentice. There is no success without a successor. Find an heir apparent that you can train to surpass you in ministry. We need to invite others to serve with us in ministry, particularly young people. If teens get plugged into church ministry while in high school, it is unlikely that they will leave the church upon graduation.

If you aren't presently serving in your local church, consider this solitary principle:

Refuse to procrastinate in service. Look for needs and seek to meet them.⁴⁹ You will never know what your gift is if you are sitting around saying, "God, show me my gift so I can get started serving You."⁵⁰ You are going to be in the same spot for a long time with that kind of prayer because God only hits a moving target. If you are not willing to do anything, the Spirit will not show you the gift He has entrusted to you.⁵¹ A professor at the University of Calgary in Alberta studied the problem of procrastination for five years and reported that 95 percent of people put off doing one thing or another. One estimate showed that Americans lose approximately \$400 million a year by putting off filing their taxes! Because of fear of failure or other insecurities, we wait and wait before starting a project or making a decision. Procrastination is a problem in the church, too. Many of us postpone serving God. We know we should reach out to others, but we feel insecure or worried about what to do. Because we're unsure of our gifts or interests, we put off our involvement in the church. We worry: What if I do a poor job? What if I find out I can't even do it? Rom 12:1 starts with presenting ourselves to God as a "sacrifice." Pray and give yourself anew to the Lord and His work. Then look around at what others are doing in your church and ask if you can join in. Your church needs you. Ask God to help you overcome your postponement problems.⁵²

One night recently, my wife and I went out to Ricardo's—a fine Italian restaurant. I had a delicious meat lovers and goat cheese pizza while Lori had a honey-glazed, stuffed pork chop. The meal was absolutely fantastic! Since I'm a man who loves food, I get excited about a good meal. As I was savoring a bite, a distinguished gentleman in a chef's hat and apron stepped out of the kitchen. I burst into exclamations of praise for the excellent meal. With a wry grin, my less flamboyant wife causally remarked that I just esteemed the dishwasher on his culinary expertise. I assured Lori that this was not the case. A few moments later he passed by again and this time I stood and applauded him. (I know, I got totally carried away.) He bowed, blushing, nodding, and unable to speak any English. At this point Lori is sliding under the table, dying of laughter. Our waitress returned and I raved about the meal. I then asked her about the chef and she confirmed Lori's assertion: I had just applauded the dishwasher! When the waitress left, I told Lori that the dishwasher probably needed some praise along with a "standing O."

In the church, there are plenty of people worthy of a standing O. It doesn't matter who you are or what area of ministry you are serving in, the Lord is pleased and so is your church. However, there are others who need to step up and serve. The result will be that your church will be built up and God will approve of your ministry. You might even receive a standing O.

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Scripture References

Romans 12:3–8

1 Corinthians 12:4–11

1 Corinthians 13:8–13

Ephesians 4:7–16

2 Timothy 1:6–7

1 Peter 4:10–11

John 15:5

Study Questions

1. What does the conjunction “For” explain (Rom 12:3)? How does 12:3–8 tie back into 12:1–2? Why does Paul include the word “everyone” in the context of 12:3–8? What are his expectations of every local church member? If my local church consisted of members just like me, how well would the body fare?
2. Is my Christian life and ministry marked by humility (Rom 12:3)? Why or why not? Why must humility reign in the area of spiritual gifts? Is Paul stating that not all Christians have the same measure of faith? What does he mean by the use of this phrase?
3. Why does Paul use the “body” motif (12:4–5)? How does this language impact the individual use of my gift? How does my church function as a ministry team? What kind of ministry teammate am I? To what degree do I care about the other ministers and ministries in my church? Am I a true team player?
4. Where else in the NT do we find a listing of the spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6–8)? Is there anything noteworthy about the seven spiritual gifts that Paul lists? How important is it that each of these gifts functions in my local church? How does the word “grace” (12:6) refer back to 12:3?
5. Do I know my spiritual gift? If not, how will I know when I have found it? What service brings me the greatest joy? What area of service makes my heart cheerful just thinking about it? What really gets me excited about serving the Lord? Am I serving in the area of my passion? If not, why not?

Notes

¹ Many Bible students have found the connection between Rom 12:1–2 and the rest of this chapter rather obscure. Yet, 12:1–2 seems to be both an introduction and a summary of the final unit of the letter (12:1–15:13). These first two verses are a call to dedication and service, while the remaining verses are a description of that service. These two verses are a general exhortation to the saint while the remaining verses are pointedly and painfully specific. Schreiner rightly observes: “Certainly the new subject in verses 3–8 signals that a fresh section commences here. Yet the *γάρ* (*gar*, for) in verse 3 suggests that the two sections should not be separated too rigidly. The exhortations in verses 3–8 flow out of the call for total commitment to God expressed in verses 1–2 and describe more concretely and practically the nature of that commitment.” Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 650.

² Ash rightly states, “We sometimes say that verse 1 means that ‘worship is not (just) about what we do in church’. This is true, although the first example Paul gives of worship in action (vv. 4–8) is about the way we behave towards one another in Christian fellowship. It is not about ‘worship’ through song or prayer, but worship expressed in serving one another. It is not about ‘me’ but about ‘us, in Christ’.” Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans, Volume 2* (London: Proclamation of Trust, 2009), 158.

³ One specific example of God’s will is revealed in Rom 12:3–8. See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 759–60. It could also be said that 12:3–8 is the first exercise of the new mind. In 12:2 Paul calls for a transformation by the renewing of your MIND. Now in 12:3 he tells you how you ought to THINK about yourself.

⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 758.

⁵ Boa and Kruidenier write: “What was the grace given to Paul? Here are the key verses that reveal the grace that was given to him: Romans 1:5: Grace and apostleship to call Gentiles to faith. Romans 15:15: Grace given to be a minister of Christ to the Gentiles. 1 Corinthians 15:10: The grace of apostleship was at work in him. Galatians 2:9: The grace given to him was evident to church leaders. Ephesians 3:7: Grace to be a servant of the gospel. Ephesians 4:7: Grace that was apportioned to him by Christ.” Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*. Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 368.

⁶ The present indicative *lego* (“I say”) is a favorite marker of Paul’s that he uses to really drive home a point (note the uses in Rom 3:5; 6:19; 9:1; 10:18, 19; 11:1, 11, 13; 15:8). Stott remarks, “‘I say to you’ is reminiscent of Jesus’ favourite expression, even without the ‘Amen’ or ‘Verily’ which often preceded it. Paul is addressing his Roman readers (every one of them, he claims) with the self-conscious authority of Christ’s apostle.” John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 325.

⁷ Rom 12:3 brings back to mind 11:18, 20 where Paul warns the Gentiles not to become arrogant or conceited. Boa and Kruidenier, *Romans*, 368 observe: “Had there been a problem with ‘status’ in the church at Rome? Very possibly, ‘Yes,’ especially in light of what Paul says to the church in chapters 14–15. But here he says, Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather . . . with sober judgment. Perhaps the Jews regarded themselves as special because of their heritage. Perhaps the Gentiles regarded themselves as preferred because of Israel’s status of being hardened by God. But Paul reiterates to them: a renewed mind sees everything through mercy-colored glasses. Living sacrifices have no status, especially sacrifices who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 760 points out that the meaning of *think* is not so much the intellectual process itself as the way one views something. It connotes the way the Christians consider themselves with respect to others in the church. So, to think too highly is to have an overly inflated view of our own importance.

⁹ There is a play on words as Paul warns his readers not to “over think” beyond what they ought to “think.” Corley and Vaughan identify the four uses of the form of *phroneo*: “Exaggerated thinking . . . proper thinking . . . purposeful thinking . . . sober thinking.” Bruce Corley and Curtis Vaughan, *Romans*. The Zondervan Study Guide Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 138.

¹⁰ See Rom 1:5; 15:15; 1 Cor 15:10; Gal 2:9; Eph 3:7; 4:7.

¹¹ However, you must also be careful to receive encouragement from fellow believers. Don’t be overly pious by always pointing to God’s grace. Believers are commanded to “encourage one another” (e.g., 1 Thess 5:11, 14; Heb 3:13). Let your fellow believers fulfill their Christian duty. When you are paid a compliment, just say “thank you,” and silently give praise to God.

¹² Michael Eaton, *Romans*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2010), 227.

¹³ Amy Carmichael (1867–1951), missionary to India, said, “Those who think too much of themselves don’t think enough.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll said, “The world’s smallest package is a man wrapped up in himself.” Quoted in John Hart, “The Letter to the Romans,” unpublished class notes (2010 ed.), Moody Bible Institute.

¹⁴ See Don Matzat, *Christ Esteem* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1990).

¹⁵ Harrison and Hagner write, “It should be added that faith, as used in this passage, is hardly the initial act of faith that makes one a Christian but faith in the sense of grasping the nature of one’s spiritual gift and having confidence to exercise it rightly.” Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, “Romans” in the *Revised Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 186. See also F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 227–28; Brendan Byrne, *Romans*. Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 371–72; Boa and Kruidenier, *Romans*, 368; Paul Barnett, *Romans: The Revelation of God’s Righteousness* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003), 274; René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield: 21st Century Press, 2005), 244; Harold W. Hoehner, “Romans” in *The Bible Knowledge Word Study* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2006), 190. Eaton comments: “When God saves a person the faith that is the channel of their salvation is also a key in their serving God. A person’s faith is not only faith for salvation; it is also faith for ministry among God’s people. And with regard to ministry each person’s faith is ‘measured’ to him with a certain quantity and a certain character. Paul is saying that each Christian has some kind of giftedness which enables him to serve God’s people.” Michael Eaton, *Romans: A Practical Exposition*, forthcoming.

¹⁶ James 4:6: “But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.’” 1 Peter 5:6: “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.”

¹⁷ Cf. 1 Cor 12:12–27; Eph 1:23; 4:4–16; 5:30; Col 1:18, 24; 2:19.

¹⁸ Bob Deffinbaugh, “Thinking Straight about Spiritual Gifts” (Rom 12:3–8): www.bible.org.

¹⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 763 notes that there is application to both the local and universal church.

²⁰ David Jeremiah, “Examine Yourself,” *Today’s Turning Point*, 3/29/2010.

²¹ Rom 12:6–8 forms one sentence in Greek with two participles but no main verb. It is usually translated as a third person imperative: “let us use.”

²² Schreiner, *Romans*, 654 rightly notes, “More likely, 12:6 is a new sentence, and an implied verb such as ‘use’ should be inserted.”

²³ This phrase is almost identical with the one in Rom 12:3: “according to the grace given to us” vs. “through the grace given to me.”

²⁴ Boa and Kruidenier, *Romans*, 372 write, “We know that everyone has been gifted by God, but we probably should not be dogmatic in asserting whether with one or more than one *charisma*. Nor should we be dogmatic about whether any or all gifts are permanent as a rule, or whether or not gifts may be given to believers according to the need of the moment. Many believers give testimony of having been aware of an unusual anointing by the Holy Spirit to meet a need in the church on a temporary basis. Was that an anointing or a gifting? We probably should not yield to our Occidental tendencies to isolate Oriental matters into categories. The Hebrew culture was much more serendipitous than ours. ‘Going with ‘the flow’ was the norm. We should incorporate into our understanding the clear teaching that the Holy Spirit has gifted us and expects us to use our gifts for the building up of the body of Christ—and then be prepared to be surprised by the Spirit if and when he dispenses grace ‘as he determines’ (1 Cor 12:11).”

²⁵ For defense of the view that spiritual gifts are ministries rather than abilities, see Kenneth Berding, “Confusing Word and Concept in ‘Gifts’: Have We Forgotten James Barr’s Exhortations?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1 (March 2000): 37–51.

²⁶ Eaton, *Romans*, 228.

²⁷ Of the seventeen occurrences of *charisma* in the NT, sixteen are in Paul (the other being 1 Pet 4:10).

²⁸ Adapted and revised from Ray Pritchard, “Blueprint for a Healthy Church” (Rom 12:3–8):

www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2006-11-09-Blueprint-for-a-Healthy-Church/. Accessed 2 July 2011.

²⁹ Ken Boa, *Reflections Newsletter*, December 1999.

³⁰ See 1 Pet 4:10–11.

³¹ Now this certainly doesn’t mean that all of our service has to take place within the four walls of the church building. For instance, many churches have elderly, homebound believers who pray faithfully. And, a young mother is serving the Lord as she takes care of her children.

³² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 764 explains Paul's purpose in giving a list of gifts here: "Paul is . . . not just listing gifts; he is exhorting each member of the community to use his or her own gift diligently and faithfully to strengthen the body's unity and help it to flourish."

³³ Cf. 1 Cor 12:8–11, 28–31; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 4:10–11.

³⁴ The last words of Rom 12:6 seem to distinguish two major categories of gifts: (1) spoken gifts (prophecy) and (2) serving gifts (service). This same distinction is found in 1 Pet 4:10–11.

³⁵ Boa and Kruidenier, *Romans*, 382. The gift of prophecy should not be equated with preaching. *Contra* John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 269; Robert Mounce, *Romans*. The New American Commentary series (Nashville: Broadman, 1995), 234.

³⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 765 notes that prophecy is not on par with the authority of apostles for prophetic speech was to be scrutinized by other prophets (1 Cor 14:29–32).

³⁷ For more on prophecy, see my sermon "Tools and Rules" (1 Cor 14:26–40) at www.timelessword.com.

³⁸ See Dunn 1988b; Schreiner 1998. Another interpretive option is according to the standards established by true doctrine ("the faith" as the content of our faith (see Cranfield 1979; Morris 1988; Stott 1994; Moo 1996).

³⁹ Each of the following gifts is described using the preposition *en*; thus they should be grouped together. Interestingly this sets them apart from the gift of prophecy, which is described using the preposition *kata* ("according to"). It appears that Paul sets prophecy apart from the other gifts mentioned, though the reasons for this separation are not clearly delineated in this passage.

⁴⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 766 and Eaton, *Romans*, 228–29 suggest that service may refer to a spiritual gift that qualifies a person to fill the role of a deacon. Boa and Kruidenier, *Romans*, 382 caution that "care must be maintained to separate a grace-gift from an office. Not everyone who has the gift of service will be a deacon; not all deacons will necessarily have the gift of service." Similarly, Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 246 concludes that "Paul seems to be using the term *ministry* in a general sense (cf. 1 Cor 12:5; 1 Pet 4:10–11) since this word is used in various ways: monetary assistance (Acts 11:29; Rom 15:25, 31), serving tables (Acts 6:1, 2; Luke 10:40), general ministry (Eph 4:12; 2 Tim 4:5, 11), the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4), apostolic ministry (1:17, 25), the Spirit's ministry (2 Cor 3:8–9) and Paul's own ministry (Rom 11:13; 1 Tim 1:12)."

⁴¹ See BDAG s.v. *haplotēs* 1: "simplicity, sincerity, uprightness, frankness." In def. 2 BDAG allows for the meaning "generosity, liberality," but then immediately concludes that this interpretation is "in dispute, and it is probable that meaning 1 in the sense of *sincere concern, simple goodness* is sufficient for all these passages." Aristotle is noted by BDAG as using the term to refer to giving in the Greco-Roman world as being done with enthusiasm and without grudging, and while Aristotle is very early for our use, it seems that his use can be helpful to our understanding. Paul has been using a great deal of philosophical terminology in these verses and certainly Aristotle is a good source to draw from in that regard. If the sense of "enthusiastically" sits in the background and the idea of "sincerity" or "uprightness" comes to the foreground then this term fits nicely with the philosophical language Paul has been employing in these verses." See also Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 442; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 768; Deffinbaugh, "Thinking Straight about Spiritual Gifts"; Harrison and Hagner, "Romans," 188.

⁴² Hoehner, "Romans," 191.

⁴³ See Luke 22:26; 1 Tim 5:17.

⁴⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 768–69 and Eaton, *Romans*, 229 suggest that Paul is likely referring to elders. However, in this context, it is more likely that Paul is speaking about a general gift of leadership.

⁴⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 658.

⁴⁶ The verb *eleeo* ("mercy") occurs six times in Romans.

⁴⁷ Gk. *hilaroteti*, a noun found only here in the NT. We get our word "hilarity" from it. Serving, encouraging, giving, and mercy are all unique to Rom 12.

⁴⁸ Stott, *Romans*, 328.

⁴⁹ Deffinbaugh, "Thinking Straight about Spiritual Gifts."

⁵⁰ D. L. Moody is quoted as saying, "Do what you can, where you are, with what you have."

⁵¹ Tony Evans, *The Promise* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 306.

⁵² Anne Cetas, "Postponement Problems," *Radio Bible Class*: www.odb.org/2009/06/24/postponement-problems/. Accessed 26 June 2011.