

Romans 12 – Grace Gifts

And so we come to one of Paul's famous 'therefore's; maybe the most well-known. As we have journeyed through this letter together, we have seen how Paul brings many different factors together to show the believers in Rome (and us!) the riches of the inheritance which has been made over to all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, whether they be Jew or Gentile. So now this 'therefore' seems to carry the whole of the letter that he has written so far, and not just the last few verses! **As a result of all that we have learned so far . . .**

These first few verses of **Romans 12** are probably very familiar, but we may not have seen all that is here! (And I'm not pretending that we shall discover it all this time, either!)

'Therefore', as we have said, brings with it all that Paul has been unfolding through this letter, and 'the mercies of God' have certainly featured in the last few chapters, as he has been writing about disobedience – refusal to believe – and the Lord's persistent offer of grace. Literally, through these mercies, we can present our bodies – our physical selves – like priests under the old covenant presented physical sacrifices in the Tabernacle and Temple. The big difference is that the sacrifice we bring is a **living** one! The word 'worship' is the same word used for religious observance or 'services' and the word translated variously as 'reasonable' or 'spiritual' is *logikos*, linked to the word *logos*, meaning word or expression.¹ Perhaps even meaning 'logical' here!

But this 'presenting' is different. The old covenant priests used to offer sacrifices repeatedly but the tense of this word 'present' here in **v.1** is a call to a 'once for all' presentation.² Significantly, having made that one-time commitment, the encouragements in **v.2** to 'not be conformed' but to 'be transformed' are in the terms of 'keep on doing this' in order to 'prove' (i.e. 'work out in practice' or 'show to be tested') God's will and purpose, which is good, well-pleasing and complete. The 'one-off' presentation is ineffective without the repeated 'proving' – and any attempts to 'prove' will fail if that one-off commitment has not been made.

There's a reason for this, says Paul in **v.3**. This working out in practice of God's purposes in our lives is designed to result in our having a sober assessment of ourselves, not too high and not too low. God has given out in portions – to each of us – a measure of faith. Not the whole amount to one person or even to a restricted group of people, but **shared out between all believers** in measures. I am reminded of **Ephesians 4:7** and the literal translation of part of **Ephesians 4:16**, the 'working in measure' of each individual part. Vital in our understanding of how the Church is designed to function!

. . . and Paul goes on to explain that in a bit more detail in the following verses. We may be familiar with this passage as the 'grace gifts' chapter, as compared

¹ The only other place this word is used in the Bible is in **1 Peter 2:2**, where it is usually translated 'of the word', or sometimes 'spiritual'.

² Compare **Hebrews 10:1 & 10-14**

with the ‘spiritual gifts’ chapters in **1 Corinthians 12 & 14**. We could do an ‘in depth’ comparison of these chapters,¹ but perhaps enough for the moment to look at **1 Corinthians 12:7 & 14:26**: “*Let all things be done for edification*”. And we need to know that ‘edification’ simply means ‘building the house’!² Although Paul doesn’t use that word here in **Romans 12**, he is very clearly writing about the same thing – contributing to the growth and welfare of the Body of Christ and each member of it.

Paul uses this picture of the Church as a body here in **Romans**, in **1 Corinthians** and in **Ephesians**. In **1 Corinthians 3**, he also uses the picture of a building, which fits neatly with his reference to ‘building the house’ in **ch.14**. Peter also writes about us being ‘built up as a spiritual house’ in **1 Peter 2:4-8**, where he uses the same word that Paul uses. Both ‘body’ and ‘house’ show a picture of a complete unit being made up of many different parts with different functions, interdependent and vitally linked together.

So this is how it works in the Church, says Paul. We are all different and we function in different ways, but we are not just members of one building or one body, we are ‘**individually members one of another**’ (**v.5**). It’s not organisational but personal!

He makes it clear in **v.6** that our different gifts and abilities in the Body are ‘*according to the grace given to us*’. They are given to us and so nothing to boast about (see **1 Corinthians 4:7**). All of them, with one exception, are ‘ordinary’ good qualities that we might expect to see in any group of people, but here they are in our lives because of the grace of God by the Holy Spirit at work in us. By contrast, in very simple terms, the spiritual gifts in **1 Corinthians 12 & 14** are demonstrations of the power of the Holy Spirit upon us. There is a significant difference.

The ‘exception’ is **prophecy**, which features in both lists. Why? It seems to me that it has the qualities of both of the main aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit, and so fits in with both the ‘supernatural gifts’ and the ‘grace gifts’. Supernatural, fairly obviously, because no-one can give a genuine ‘thus says the Lord’ message unless the Lord has really spoken to them.³ And grace, because true prophecy is more than just the factual content of the words. The prophet also needs to embody the heart of God and especially when the message is not an easy one to receive. It needs to be delivered with the same compassion and concern which characterise the remaining ‘grace gifts’ in this chapter, actively delivering an aspect of God’s own grace . . .

Service. Putting yourself at the disposal of other people to meet their needs. Perhaps not as common as we would like to see in everyday life, but not the exclusive domain of Christians, by any means. Many people of differing faiths and none choose to do this in vastly diverse ways and it typifies the attitude of heart of trying to help, even at some personal cost. The Greek word *diakonia*

¹ See the chapter ‘The Need for Spiritual Gifts?’ in [Designed to Grow](http://justonecandle.uk) from justonecandle.uk

² See ‘Building the House’ at <https://www.justonecandle.uk/PDFs/BuildingTheHouse1.pdf>

³ Hence the need for words of prophecy to be ‘judged’ for genuineness by those who listen to them. See **1 Corinthians 14:29**. Here, the ‘judgment’ is really discernment.

(‘service’) has the same root as the word *diakonos*, translated in the New Testament as ‘servant’, ‘minister’ or ‘deacon’. Not the same as a slave, who has no choice in his service; *diakonos* is someone who chooses to serve.

Teaching. Literally, the Greek word means ‘to cause to learn’, something that most teachers (of any sort) seek to do, and by which they may judge their success. Many people do this in all walks of life and probably most would say that the true reward of teaching is to see real changes in those who are taught – they have been ‘caused to learn’. In a Christian context, the rewards are multiplied when those who learn apply what they have learned and lives are radically changed as a result.

Exhortation, Encouraging, Comforting. ‘Being called alongside’ is the literal meaning of the word, which reflects a desire to share someone else’s situation and circumstances with a view to making them better able to cope. Again, welcome in all aspects of life and those who take on this role enrich the lives of others. The Greek word for someone who does this is *parakletos*, ‘someone called alongside’, the word used by the Lord Jesus to describe the Holy Spirit ¹ and by John to describe Jesus as our advocate with the Father ².

Giving. Contributing cash, goods, time or effort can sometimes be done in a fairly detached, even cold, way. The word here might be better translated ‘sharing’ – literally ‘giving with’ – which means real involvement with the gift. ‘With liberality’ say some translations, but the basic meaning of the word is ‘singleness’ or ‘simplicity’, so ‘sincerity’ also fits. Not with any ulterior motive for anyone’s approval. Jesus’s comments about the way to give seem very appropriate ³.

Leading. ‘Standing before’ needs to be done with earnestness, diligence and eagerness, says Paul. No empty holding of a leadership ‘position’, but with real application, even speed!

Showing mercy, or having compassion. Not what we might have expected in a list of gifts, but there are some who are definitely gifted in this department, again right across all communities. Cheerfulness might not be what we would expect here, either, but this is essential, says Paul.

And so, from **v.9** onwards the list moves from being a list of gifts into encouragement to live lives that overflow in many practical ways with the grace that is given to us . . .

V.9. Genuine love. We all know the difference between acts of love that really come from the heart and those that can be done from a sense of duty or obligation! **Utterly detesting evil** and **gluing yourself to good.** (Literal meanings!)

V.10. Devoted to one another in brotherly love. The word ‘devoted’ used here is normally reserved for close relationships within the family. Yes, that close! **Leading the way for others in giving honour.** (Literal meaning.)

¹ *John 14:16, 26 , John 16:7*

² *1 John 2:1*

³ *Matthew 6:1-4*

V.11. Not delaying in diligence. The same word already used for those who lead in **v.8**. It means ‘speed, diligence, eagerness or earnestness’ and fits well with being **fervent** (literally, ‘on the boil’) **in spirit, serving** (literally, ‘being a slave to’) **the Lord**.

. . . and so the list continues to the end of the chapter with direct instructions for radical living. As we read on, it becomes more and more evident that this sort of lifestyle is impossible without the grace of God at work in our lives.

V.12. Hope as a source of joy. This is a ‘sure and certain hope’ (**Hebrews 6:19**). Keeping going under pressure, strong and earnest towards prayer.

V.13 ‘Contributing’ (literally, ‘sharing in common’) with the needs of fellow-believers. Practising (literally, ‘pursuing’) hospitality.

V.14 Blessing (literally, ‘speaking well of’) those who ‘pursue’ us. Much too easy to want to curse them!

V.15 Genuinely sharing in the joys and sorrows of our brothers and sisters.

V.16 No mind games! Exercising our minds towards each other; not ‘high and mighty’ in our thinking but going along with humble thoughts and people. Not reckoning ourselves to be super-intelligent!

V.17 Never repaying evil with evil to anyone – not even one! Looking out beforehand for what is right in everyone’s eyes.

V.18 At peace with everyone, as much as we possibly can from our side!

V.19-20 Leaving any question of ‘revenge’ completely with the Lord. It’s not our prerogative!

V.21 Not allowing evil to triumph. See **v.9 & 17**. The grace of God in us is more powerful!

If we just took all these instructions as rules that we needed to follow in order to be real followers of Jesus, we would default very quickly and maybe write ourselves off as failures. In fact, for much of the remainder of this letter to the believers in Rome, Paul seems to be telling them what they need to do. If we take it all as a code of practice to be followed ‘religiously’, we will miss out and get ourselves into condemnation. These are all examples of the external and visible results of the work of the grace of God in our lives. This is the outworking of **Romans 6-8**!

As someone has wisely said, “All the commands in the New Testament are addressed to the new nature in Christ.”

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