

## Paul's Teachings Concerning Gifts in Romans 12:3-6

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#### Introduction

Paul's letter to the Romans can be divided into two major sections: doctrinal teachings concerning salvation (chapters 1-11, with 9-11 specifically focused on the salvation of the Jews), and practical teachings (chapters 12-16, including the final chapter of greetings).

Romans 12:1-2, the first two verses of the practical section are well-known and often cited. Christians are to live sacrificially, presenting themselves to God in worship – holy and acceptable. Such sacrificial living is possible through transformation that begins on the inside, the renewal of the mind to test and discern God's will.

One can reasonably expect that 12:3-6 will expand 12:1-2. The principles set forth regarding gifts in 12:3-6 are applied to various areas of Christian service in 12:6-8.

#### The Text of Romans 12:3-6

Here is a translation of the text with an italicized paraphrase designed to clarify the message and meaning. The translation notes parenthetically the use of specific Greek words and alternative translation options.

3 For I say through (by) the grace (favor, gift) given to me, to all who are among you

*[I am able to speak this to all of you because God gives me grace/favor/gift]*

Not to think highly (hyper-phroneo) beyond that which it is necessary (fitting) to think (phroneo)

*[not to think too highly, beyond that which is appropriate to think]*

But to think (phroneo) for the purpose (eis) of sound thinking (so-phroneo), each one (particularly) as God apportioned (divided out, merizo) a measure (metron) of faith.

*[vv. 4-6 functions to explain the last phrase in v. 3; the phrase is repeated but with the use of a synonym in v. 6]*

4 For exactly as in one body many members we have, and each member does not have the same action (praxis)

5 in the same way, the many in ("one, inserted for clarity) body we are in Christ, and members according to/of (kata) one another.

6 And having different graces (charismata, favors, gifts, grace-gifts) according to the grace given to us; if prophecy, according to the ratio (proportion, analogia) of faith....

*[in the context, the phrase "measure of faith" in v. 3 and the phrase "proportion of faith" in v. 6 are synonyms]*

#### Analysis of Romans 12:3-6

Verse 3. Paul in humility explains that what he has written and what he is writing is possible because of what God has done in his life. He has received God's grace (charis, favor, gift), enabling him to speak (charisma) to all who are at Rome.

On the basis of the attitude he wants to exhibit (and does exhibit throughout the letter to the Romans), his counsel is that no Christian should "think beyond" or "think highly." The kind of thinking that is fitting and proper places a limit. There is no place for pride, competition, looking down at others, judging, criticizing. (Is Paul anticipating Chapters 14-15?).

Put another way, the purpose or goal of our thinking is sound thinking, not exalted thinking. The best motivation toward sober and proper thinking is to remember that God is the one who gives gifts. God is the one who distributes, makes us different, empowers his people in different ways. The phrase, "measure of faith," suggests that no one person has the entirety of the faith experience. Each has a portion, one's own inheritance, role, gift, ability.

Verse 4. To clarify the point, v. 4 gives an illustration. This principle ("measure of faith") can be seen in the body where there are many members but each member has a different role or action.

Verse 5. Likewise, v. 5, in the one body, we work together (we are members according to the others, members of the others, members together). That work makes full use of the different gifts and roles of the members.

Verse 6. This verse concludes the explanation of v. 3. Each one has different "grace-gifts" according to the grace given to us (parallel to v. 3 and Paul's description of himself). Receiving God's grace (charis) is connected to receiving God's gifts (charisma), for the benefit of the body. Paul's experience in this matter was parallel to every Christian. He received grace from God; each Christian receives grace from God. The grace of God received results in the different "grace-gifts," so that each one is enabled according to the part-distribution [measure (v. 3) or proportion (v. 6)] of faith. This giftedness enables various areas of Christian service as explained in vv. 6-8.