

Romans – Bible Study – Chapter 12:3-21

We have looked at the first two verses which concern our response to God's grace and how will we maintain that commitment towards God. From that study, we know the magnitude of what that means, in order to live a life that God wants from each of us.

Today, we will be exploring the second part of the overall "sphere" of influence, namely other Christians and the world around us. How are we to respond to fellow brothers and sisters? How are we to respond to those who do not know the word of God? Paul will tell us what our actions should be as children of God.

Gifts of Grace

(Verses 3-5) Why does Paul begin this passage with the words "For by the grace given to me ..."? Why does Paul stress the need to be humble when evaluating and exercising their gifting? What is the body analogy trying to illustrate (1 Corinthians 12:12-30)?

- Paul wants to 'inform' or remind the Roman believers of his apostolic authority
- He also acknowledges that his position and ministry come from God and not from himself
- He most likely did not meet any of the Roman believers personally so he is urging to receive his teaching with humility
- Pride is the enemy of true righteousness
- All the gifts come from God and all are meant to be used for His glory, not our own
- We need to use sober (or sound) judgement about ourselves and not to be arrogant or prideful
- We are to use the gifts for the benefits of others (1 Peter 4:10)
- As members of each other, we cannot work independently effectively
- Each member benefits from the contribution of every other member
- This realization should help us to avoid becoming proud
- It can also refer that God's word should guide the way we think about ourselves
- Paul uses the metaphor of the body to illustrate the principle of diversity and unity
- His point is that we have unity with one another, not because we are all the same, but because we are all spiritually united with Christ
- We are not just a loose collection of individuals each doing our own thing
- The body of Christ is a unified organism ('one body'), and its members are diverse, personally and in their functions

(Verses 6-8) The gifts that Paul lists here is not a full or exhaustive list (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28-30; Ephesians 4:7-11). What are the two major categories of gifts here? How are we to use these gifts (1 Peter 4:10-11)

- There are "Spoken" gifts and "Serving" gifts
- The "Spoken" gifts include prophecy, teaching, and exhortation
- The "Serving" gifts include giving, leading, and giving mercy
- 1 Peter 4:10-11 – We are to use the gifts to serve one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God
- We are to use these gifts to build each other up, for the glory of God
- With the "Spoken" gifts, a guideline that Paul gives is that we are to "Keep within the boundaries of the revealed Word of God", that is, Paul cautions all who speak to do so in a way completely consistent with Scripture
- With the "Serving" gifts, a guideline is to remain in the context of the service they have been given, meaning they are to focus on what they need to do and not to necessarily critique others (Romans 14:4)
- To summarize, we are to use these gifts in a proper way (i.e. for the purposes God has destined them for and not for our own gain or purpose)

Love for fellow believers

(Verses 9-13) Paul talks about the love that each Christian should have for their fellow believers. What are some of the actions described in these passages that demonstrate the marks of a true Christian?

- Our love for one another must be sincere, meaning that it should be genuine and ‘without hypocrisy’ (1 John 4:19-21)
- Sincere love gives without regard to self
- The totally committed Christian should hate (‘abhor’) evil and love (‘cling to’) what is good, as his/her Lord does, expressing commitment to His attitudes and His actions
 - Essentially, we should love and hate what the Lord loves and hates
- V. 10 – The love that we should to fellow Christians should go beyond friendship. The suggestion is that it is a committed and self-sacrificing love, similar to that in a family
- V. 11 – It is a warning “not to be lazy”, but to maintain the zeal or fervor of serving one another. This means to keep up or maintain that level of commitment
- V.12 – Christians share the same “hope” in Christ, knowing that in this life, what we have to endure is ‘not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us’ (Romans 8:18)
 - This will help us to persevere and remain joyful, especially when tribulations come
 - We can encourage and remind each other of this hope and the future that is to come
- V. 13 – We are instructed here and in Galatians 6:10 to care for those in the family of believers
 - It should not be a passive action (i.e. a reaction to a need), but rather an active action, that we are to look to help those in the family that are in need
 - As well, our actions should not necessarily be focused on those we ‘get along with’, but for also those family ‘members’ who we may not associate with.
- In all these actions, we do see elements of love towards one another, as Christ would want us to have for each other, as stated in His second greatest commandment (to love your neighbor as yourself)
- These actions also need to be active in every respect and not reactive or passive

Love for all

(Verses 14-21) How are we to treat others, especially those not of the faith? How are we to live at peace with everyone (v.18-19)? Can we always be at peace ?

- V. 14 – We are to forgive others and not to retaliate against them, but rather, to ask for God’s blessing upon them
 - This is similar to Matthew 5:43-48 and Luke 6:27-36
- V. 15 – Believers are to share in the joys and sorrows of their neighbours and not to be indifferent towards them
- V. 16 – We should be humble, especially in the fact that we are the recipients of God’s grace (1 Corinthians 4:7)
 - There is no place for us to feel superior to one another, as that would mean we deny that Christ gives us our strength and that we are not dependent on him, which would be incorrect (John 15:5)
- V. 17 – Do not repay evil for evil, but let God judge accordingly
 - We should do what is right in light of God’s word so that others may see God’s righteousness in us
- V. 20-21 – We should do the opposite when antagonized. We should do good, as to heap ‘burning coals’ on one’s head, to shame the antagonist into acknowledging his error and maybe turning to God in repentance.
 - We do not let evil deeds make us become evil, thereby by doing good, we overcome evil
- V. 18-19 – We should always be the peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), but we are not to live in peace at any price.
 - Believers should not be an instigator
 - It may also mean that we are to suffer wrong without retaliating
 - In certain situations, peace may give way to conflict, especially if the Gospel is at stake (Galatians 2:11)
 - Christ and Paul were at odds with religious leaders and Jews, respectively

- We are called to be Christ ambassadors so when we are at odds with others for the sake of Christ, we should stand for the truth, but not to take action that is contrary to God's word

Paul also exhorts each of us to serve one another, in order to build up the church. The body is a good illustration of how each of us are to work together for the good of the church. We are each given a specific function, which is given to us as prescribed by God, that we are 'gifted' in performing. We are not independent beings, but rather 'inter-dependent' to one another, building and benefiting each other. Upon this realization, it should prevent us from becoming proud.

Paul instructs that our conduct must be signs and evidence that we belong to Christ. What we do must show that we belong to the family of God and that our conduct towards each other must reflect that. As well, our conduct to the world must also show that we followers of God, knowing that our actions would reflect who He is. Paul also asks us to leave in peace with one another, but it does not come at any price.

Points to Ponder:

- Is your pursuit and interest in spiritual gifts one of personal ambition motivated by self-interest? Or do you, out of gratitude, wish to offer up your body to God in sacrificial service to others?
- Are you doing everything you can to show love to your fellow brother or sister? Do your friends, who are not believers, know that you are a Christian by your actions?