

Believers are Responsible to Serve Others in the Body of Christ

Romans 12:3-8

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Background Notes

In verse 3 Paul mentioned of “the grace” that was given to him. What “grace” was that? Paul was thinking particularly of God’s grace shown to him in calling him to his special position as an apostle. Not only was Paul called to be an apostle, he was especially called to be an apostle to the Gentiles. *“For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles...”* (Romans 11:14). And in Galatians 2:7-8 Paul said, *“...they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter ⁸ (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles)...”* And notice Galatians 2:9: *“when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”* So the “grace” that Paul mentioned in Romans 12:3 was his special position as an apostle, and particularly as an apostle to the Gentiles.

The church at Rome was primarily comprised of Gentile believers, and in verse 3 Paul reminded them that he was an apostle, and particularly called to be an apostle to the Gentiles, so what he was teaching them had the Lord’s authority behind it. The same general thought is in Romans 15:15-16, *“Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶ that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”* One of the great truths revealed to the apostle Paul was the truth that the church is the body of Christ. Our Lord didn’t reveal that truth in the gospels. It was revealed later to and through the apostle Paul. This was all part of the grace that was given to the apostle Paul.

So Paul had the privilege and responsibility not only to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, but also teach the great truth of the Church as the body of Christ – that Jew and Gentile believers are brought together into one body, that Christ is the head of the body, that every individual believer is a member of that body and that every member has a vital function to fulfill in that body.

This section of Romans 12 is one of the great “body life” passages in the New Testament. There are others. 1 Corinthians 12 is a great body life passage, and Ephesians 2-4 teaches great truths of the Church as the body of Christ. The concept of body life is more than just the fact that we as believers are in the body of Christ. The biblical concept of body life is that **we serve one another** -- **not** that the members of the body serve us, but that we as members serve them! We serve the body. That’s the biblical concept of body life. Our function in the body of Christ is to serve the body, not vice versa.

Too many Christians have the wrong concept – they seem to think that “the body of Christ exists to serve **me!**” No -- the biblical concept of body life is that we as members serve the body. Do you have the biblical concept of body life, or do you have it backwards?

How do we properly serve the body? A number of points are made in this section about body life and about the proper function of members in the body of Christ.

Doctrinal Point

The godly believer practices the biblical concept of body life by realizing that:

a. You aren't the only member of the body!

“For I say... to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith...” (v3). In other words, don’t think you’re the most important member of the body! You’re not the only one only one who has faith -- **each member** of the body has been given a measure of faith.

Notice, by the way, it says **faith**, not **knowledge**. There is a tendency for some Christians to think that if they have a lot of Bible knowledge that somehow they’re more important members of the body. Not so! I know a Christian man who has a lot of Bible knowledge, but he thinks he has more knowledge of the things of God than just about anyone else! This self-important man spends a lot of his time writing letters to individual Christians to correct what **he** thinks is wrong in their lives -- because he thinks that **he** has the last word on biblical truth and Christian living! He needs to learn and practice the biblical concept of body life. Remember -- you’re **not** the only member of the body!

b. You are a body member, not a club member!

Another important point about body life: you’re a **body** member, not a **club** member! *“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (v4-5).* Remember that the church is not a social club, even though some Christians treat the church that way. The church is a body. It’s an **organism** -- not an **organization**. As an organism, every member is vital and every member is needed for the body to function properly. Verse 5 again, *“and individually members of one another.”*

You can join in or drop out of a social club – it doesn't matter. It doesn't make any difference -- the club goes on with or without you. But in a body, **every member is vital**. Every member is important. It's like our physical bodies -- when any part of our body isn't doing its job properly, our entire body is affected. In the same way, the whole body of Christ suffers when a member doesn't function properly, or when a member drops out.

So on the one hand, don't think of yourself more highly than you should, but on the other hand, don't think of yourself as unimportant! If you're a Christian, you're a member of the body of Christ and therefore you're important for the proper functioning for the body.

Are you a Christian hermit? Do you only come out of your hermit's hut on Sunday morning? That's not practicing the biblical concept of body life. Don't be a Christian hermit -- get involved! Remember you're a body member, not a club member.

c. You are a gifted member of the body!

"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them..." You're not only a member of the body -- you're a **gifted** member of the body! You have a spiritual gift – at **least** one! Maybe you're not sure about that: "I know that I'm a member of the body, but I don't know whether I'm a gifted member." Let me read 1 Peter 4:10 to you: *"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."* You have at least one spiritual gift.

A number of spiritual gifts are listed here in Romans 12 -- not all the gifts, but a number of them. Prophecy (v6) is the spiritual gift of speaking forth the Word of God. We all should be involved in speaking forth the Word of God, but some people are **gifted** in speaking forth the Word of God. Ministry or serving (v7) is the particular gift area of caring for the material needs of the individuals in the body -- like the deacons in Acts 6. All of us should do what we can to meet the material needs of fellow believers, but meeting needs is also a spiritual gift. Maybe that's your spiritual gift. Those who have this spiritual gift often are more sensitive than others to the needs of fellow believers.

The last part of verse 7 has greatly influenced my life – *"he who teaches, in teaching..."* The idea here is that the person who teaches must spend time and put emphasis on teaching. As a younger Christian, I thought that I could and should do it all! I felt guilty if I wasn't involved in every single Christian activity going! Then the Lord convicted me through this verse. If you're called to be a teacher, it's wrong not to put lots of time and effort in and on that gift -- including many hours of studying, writing and preparing.

Verse 8 mentions other spiritual gifts: exhortation (or encouragement), giving, leading, and showing mercy. Did you know that showing mercy is a spiritual gift? It has to do with helping to relieve stress when someone is in trouble. Maybe you have that gift! If so, you'll be able to say when someone asks you, "What's your spiritual gift?" you can say, "I show mercy!" They'll look at you and wonder, "What spiritual gift is that? I never saw that." and you can show them this

passage! Everyone is gifted, and every gift is necessary for the proper functioning of the body. Remember, the godly believer practices the biblical concept of body life.

Practical Application

Ask not what the body can do for you, but what you can do for the body!

Most of us have heard the well-known statement made by President Kennedy in his inaugural address in 1960: “Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country.” Well, Romans 12 certainly applies that concept to our function in the body of Christ. Look at verse 6 again: “*Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, **let us use them...***” (emphasis added).

“But how do I know what my spiritual gift is?” That’s always the question that students ask me when we talk about the subject of spiritual gifts, and mention the fact that everyone has spiritual gifts. “How do I know what my gift is?” What’s the biblical answer? **Get involved in serving others!**

Get involved in serving others! There are many areas in which believers can become involved. It may be helping to clean or repair the church building, or teaching a small group Bible study or a Sunday School or VBS class, or bringing groceries to a financially-troubled family, or leading the youth group, or assisting an elderly or disabled person who needs help around the house, or encouraging someone who has family problems, or writing to someone in the military or in missions, or comforting someone who has been bereaved -- there are so many needs and many places where body members can become involved. **Just get involved** -- and you’ll come to know where your spiritual gift lies! You’ll find out what your spiritual gift is as people are blessed and encouraged through what you’re doing. In addition, you will experience joy and blessing in your own life as you serve others!

Don’t just think of how the body can serve **you** and meet **your** needs, or relieve **your** stress, or give to **you**. These things will happen if you need help -- but don’t think that way! Catch the biblical concept of body life. Ask not what the body can do for you, but what you can do for the body!