

Sermons through

Romans

One Body In Christ

Romans 12:3-8

Part Three

Exhort, Give, Lead, Mercy

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
5/8/2016*

One Body In Christ

Romans 12:3-8

Part Four

Exhort, Give, Lead, Mercy

For I say, through the grace given to me, 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. ⁴ 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. ⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; ⁷ or ministry, *let us use it in our ministering*; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸ he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Romans 12:3-8).

Review

We are in Part Four of a short series entitled *One Body In Christ*. In Part One, which was entitled *Sober Up*, we spoke of having a humble, sober view of our own contributions as we fulfill the biblical mandate of ministering to one another. In Part Two, which was entitled *Out of the Many, One*, we did a sort of 'big things-little things' analysis of our lives as it speaks to the Apostle Paul's metaphor of the church as a body. In Part Three we discussed the gifts of *Prophecy, Ministry and Teaching*.

In quick review we read, "**For I say, through the grace given to me.**" Paul will speak of the "**grace that is given to us**" (verse 6) but not until he informs us of the grace given to him. It is with apostolic authority that we are to heed these words, always recognizing that it is all of grace. We discussed how grace does not always mean there will be no difficulties or trials, but let us always be reminded that it is by the pure grace *charitos*, favor and pleasure of God that we are numbered among His children, that we are informed of His will and given gifts to aid one another. It is all of grace.

We then see that this message is not aimed at some particular, elite or highly skilled quadrant of the congregation but "**to everyone who is among you.**" The temptations, obligations, gifts, joys and pleasures of what it means to

operate as the body of Christ – the family of God – belong to young and old, male and female, the novice, the journeymen or the highly trained.

And one of the great temptations which creep into the church is addressed with the words that the Christian is **“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.”** Whatever skills, gifts or strengths a person has are a gift from God. This includes faith itself. High-mindedness is delusional.

The Apostle then describes the diversity and unity of body of Christ **“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.”** The church is not merely something a Christian visits on Sundays to aid in their personal faith. It is a body of which we are part. We are designed with mutual dependence; we need each other.

Respecting the particular gifts, they differ **“according to the grace that is given to us”** and we are to exercise those gifts **“in proportion to our faith.”** This is to say that we are to play within our game. We are to beware of operating beyond or beneath or means. God has given all “a measure of faith” and we are to responsibly exercise our gifts in a manner proportionate to that faith.

The Apostle then mentions seven gifts: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy. The first four gifts mentioned are mentioned with the idea of focusing in on what we should be doing. The final three gifts attach a disposition. Of course focus and disposition should accompany all gifts – including the ones not recorded here (and some perhaps not recorded at all, since there does not appear to be an exhausting listing). Some believe that there are as many gifts as there are needs in the body of Christ.

We finished last time speaking of **“prophecy”** being the word of God, **“ministry”** being the general idea of serving and **“teaching”** being the daunting task of seeking to present accurate information about the character and nature of God and what God requires of man according to the Scriptures.

This brings us up to date. Paul continues:

...he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Romans 12:8).

Exhort

As mentioned the little prepositional phrases are a bit different for the first four than for the last three. The first four denote the sphere in which the gift is to be exercised while the last three more the manner in which the gift should be performed. We now move to the final gift of the first category – “**exhort**” – *parakalon*.

Many years ago (as a very young man) one of the first ministerial projects I was ever involved with was in Hawaii (I know...tough). The majority of the participants on this project were from the south – while I was from Southern California. It was one of the first times I realized how very different people from various parts of the country can be.

I carried a typical brash and somewhat smug temperament that symbolized what people might have suspected of a Southern Californian. In that respect things haven't changed much in forty years. There was one Southern lady who wasn't about to put up with it. On almost a daily basis she would be waiting for me at the bottom of the driveway to correct some behavior she had seen in me on the prior day.

She would preface her comments with the announcement that she had the gift of exhortation. I must say I admired the brine in her blood. She wasn't about to ignore what appeared to her any unseemly behavior on my part. To this day I ponder the comments and criticisms she made. And I think to this very day they've been helpful – if for no other reason for me to consider how I might appear to others. Yet at the same time I had the severe impression that she was just frustrated with me.

What does “**exhort**” mean? The word *parakaleo* literally means a calling to one's side (*para*, beside, *kaleo*, to call). Depending on the context the word has various meanings. It has been translated “**appeal**” (1 Corinthians 1:10), “**urge**” (1 Corinthians 4:16), “**encouragement**” (1 Corinthians 14:3), “**console**” (Luke 2:25).

When it gets right down to it, it's an appeal to action. It is not necessarily a rebuke *elencho* which is a stronger word carrying a clear accusation of wrongdoing and it is not mere teaching, which concentrates more on content – when someone exhorts they are summoning to the person who has been instructed to put shoe-leather to what they have learned – to be stirred from our lethargy. One is reminded of Paul's words in Ephesians.

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise (Ephesians 5:14b-15).

It's been said that...

...all preaching, whether by apostles, prophets, or teachers, was followed up by exhortation (Ac 11:23; 14:22; 15:32).¹

We see it used in reference to general faithfulness.

When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose (Acts 11:23).

In faithfulness to a specific act.

So I thought it necessary to urge (*parakalesai*) the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction (2 Corinthians 9:5).

Exhortation is that uncomfortable, yet priceless chapter in the conversation where someone cares enough to address behavior. Since there are some people who seem to have an unhealthy enjoyment in correcting others, one more thing needs to be said. It has to do with our disposition when we exhort.

For you know how, like a father with his children,¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:11, 12).

Paul wants his readers to know that his exhortation comes from a loving, paternal heart. It can be tricky business to exhort without exasperating the children (Ephesians 6:4). It is easy for the person exhorted to feel judged rather

¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 252). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

than loved. There are people we all know who love us. They can say almost anything and we'll classify as an act of love. While others, the moment they open their mouths, we feel judged and oppressed. Though we are all called to exhort at some level, the person gifted in exhortation is the former and not the latter.

These last three gifts (giving, leading and mercy) focus more on the manner in which the gift should be performed.

"...he who gives, with liberality."

Give

Similar to other gifts, giving *metadidomi* is to be exercised by all. Yet there appears to be those who have a strong calling in this category. From time to time the faith has become so Gnostic (a heresy which focused on the immaterial, while ignoring the material aspects of the faith) that giving (giving is most likely speaking of the giving of funds) is commonly downplayed as very minor and the low watermark of Christian service. Yet people will often harbor these sentiments while sitting in buildings paid for by those who give, with liberality.

Examples of those who fall into this category include both wealthy and poor. Joseph of Arimathea was a **"good and righteous man" (Luke 23:50)** who used his wealth to provide for the burial of Jesus (Matthew 27:57-60). At the same time the **"poor widow"** is commended by Jesus for giving out of her poverty rather than her abundance (Mark 12:42-44). We see Paul express a similar commendation to the churches of Macedonia who in their **"extreme poverty...overflowed in a wealth of generosity...For they gave according to their means...and beyond their means, of their own accord" (2 Corinthians 8:1-3).**

It is worth noting that when Paul writes **"of their own accord"** he is indicating this offering was not by **"command"** but by a demonstration of love (2 Corinthians 8:8). This is distinct from 1 Corinthians where he appeals to **"the Law"** or the tithe as the means by which the church is to be financed (1 Corinthians 9:8). It is here that we see the phrase 'tithes and offerings' originate. I've heard it put as God's tithe and our offering. Although God owns all, the tithe is His in a sanctified way (Malachi 3:8) while the offering is calculated by the love we have for a particular ministry or people.

The disposition to accompany our giving is expressed in the word **"liberality"** *haploteti*. It is translated various ways: **"openness, generosity,**

simplicity.” There are many things to avoid and pursue in our giving. We are to pursue generosity, cheerfulness and giving out of our need rather than abundance. We are to avoid giving with the expectation of recognition or special favor. Liberality and simplicity cover all these dispositions.

“...the one who leads, with zeal.”

Leading

To **“lead”** *proistemi* is again a general term of leadership and can apply to the home, the church or various aspects of either. Although as Presbyterians we recognize that the church is governed by a plurality of elected elders, there are those who are given positions of leadership in various capacities. You can be in charge of the potlucks, home-groups, the web-page, worship, etc. Not everything is run by a committee – it can be highly inefficient to try to write a sentence.

When put in charge of a project, it is to be pursued with **“zeal”** *spoude* which can also be translated **“diligence, speed, haste, earnestness.”** When taking charge of a specific responsibility we might want to ask ourselves if the level of diligence we at which we are pursuing this task would hold up if it was our actual job.

The thing about being in charge is lack of immediate accountability. It’s been said,

Leaders 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 a zealous effort.²

“...he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Mercy

The gift of **“mercy”** *eleon* generally pertains to those who demonstrate a special level of compassion for the sick, emotionally downcast or other distress (though we should all pursue with gift/virtue).

Our exercise of this gift should be accompanied by **“cheerfulness”** *hilaroteti*. This is the same word from 2 Corinthians 9:7 where we read that God

² Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Romans* (Vol. 6, p. 660). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

loves a cheerful giver. It is where we derive our word 'hilarious'. One of the earliest lessons I learned as a young man in the ministry was from an older pastor who explained (with a bit of frustration) how a fellow pastor would visit people in the hospital only to tell them how sick he was. We are to bring a spirit of joy to our mercy.

Not too many years back I was visiting a young boy who had cancer. As I walked through the wing dedicated to pediatric oncology it became a tough little journey – observing parents with their sick children. By the time I reached the room I intended to visit I had to gather myself. It is a little tricky. You want to bring some cheer – a little sunshine in the room with you (without bringing the whole sun in).

It should be an honor and, at some level, a delight to be a soul who dispenses mercy. It is just too easy to develop a begrudging spirit, where the person you're seeking to help senses that they are a burden – a debt instead of a joy. We are called to **"joyfully work(s) righteousness" (Isaiah 64:5)**. A gift given with a martyr's attitude vacuums the life out of the whole event.

Conclusion

It might be helpful in our service of Christ and one another to consider Him **"who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that (we) may not grow weary or fainthearted" (Hebrews 12:3)**. Jesus **"endured the cross...despised the shame...for the joy that was set before Him" (Hebrews 12:2)**.

It is ever vital that we look to the work and heart of Christ. That all of our efforts are done in light of the gospel – of the work done for us that we might inherit eternal life and **"every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3)**. At their very best, the efforts of the world receive a **"perishable wreath, but we an imperishable" (1 Corinthians 9:25)**.

Questions for Study

1. Review Romans 12:3-7. Why is it important to recognize it is all of grace? To whom are the Apostle's words written? What does it mean to think soberly? What does it mean to exercise gifts in proportion to our faith? What is prophecy, ministry and teaching (pages 2, 3)?
2. Define "exhort". What should we avoid when exhorting? How can exhortations be uncomfortable? Why are they necessary? What should govern our sentiment when exhorting (pages 4-6)?
3. How can Gnosticism affect giving? What does it mean to give with liberality (pages 6, 7)?
4. What are some temptations that accompany leadership (page 7)?
5. What does it mean to be merciful? Give examples. What temperament should accompany mercy (pages 7, 8)?
6. Why is important that all our service be done in light of the gospel? How can we imitate Christ in our service (page 8)?