

## Romans: Verse-by-Verse

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### Romans 12:3-5

#### Study Notes:

Verse 3 sets up a series of encouragements on how individual believers are gifted to build up the body of Christ. This process cannot happen without the renewal of the mind, because the unrenewed mind will not accept what Paul is about to say.

- **A Healthy Self-Assessment:**

Paul begins this section with the words, “By the grace given me...”

His focus is still on grace. Although the Gentiles had not sought righteousness, they found it. It came to them through grace. The Jews have largely rejected the Messiah, but God still plans on finishing what he began with them – by grace.

As we put grace in focus, Paul wants to talk about a healthy, functioning body of believers – whether Gentiles or the Jews.

Paul begins with, “... By the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”

Paul invokes God's grace – specifically, the grace that was shown him. He's not making demands of them as Christ's apostle. He is reminding them that he received grace for his sins long before they knew him as an apostle. Paul is ever conscious of how grace brought him to where he is.

In Timothy 1:16, Paul says, "... But God was merciful to me in order that Christ Jesus might show his full patience in dealing with me, the worst of sinners, as an example for all those who would later believe in him and receive eternal life."

- **Why Stress Grace and Self-Assessment?**

Recognizing the magnitude of God's grace is the prerequisite to displaying humility in our Christian lives and our unique giftings.

Paul repeats the phrase, "think of yourself" twice, just in this opening sentence. He is acutely aware that our "self-opinion" is highly selective. All of us have an image of ourselves that may or may not be shared by others, so the process starts with our thinking.

This process starts with our thinking, not our actions. Four times in this passage, Paul will use the Greek word, "Phronein", "to think". He's urging us to make a sober assessment of ourselves and our gifts as we avoid two errors: Thinking too much of ourselves and thinking too little of ourselves.

- **Making A Sober Assessment:**

To make this "sober" assessment, we use two markers: our faith and our gifts. Paul writes, "... Think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

The "measure of faith" is a very interesting phrase. Different scholars have attached various meanings to it. One famous commentator, C. Cranfield, insisted there were seven possible meanings to the word "measure", five for "faith", and two for "of" – leaving us with 70 combinations.

One of the main considerations is whether Paul meant the word "measure" – ("metron") to mean a tool for quantifying faith or the measured quantity itself.

If Paul meant the measure or quantity of faith, that would keep us humble. It would mean that we cannot, on our own, decide how much faith we will have. That clearly puts God in charge of the measure of faith and the degree of the gifts we operate in.

C. Cranfield believed that Paul was saying that the gospel is the first measure by which we should evaluate ourselves. The gifts, then, were a secondary issue.

- **Grace, Faith, and Gifts: The Human Body Analogy**

To diagram the correlation of grace, faith, and gifts, Paul speaks about the human body and the Christian community. This is Paul's favorite analogy of Christian life and conduct.

Verse 4: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

Each human body has many parts – and all have their own purpose. Each part of the body contributes to the entire body.

Paul uses the word "function" to identify the uniqueness of each part of the human body. Each part of our human body has a function.

Some parts function to provide motor skills; some parts function to enable digestion; some parts function to empower cognitive abilities. And none of these are interchangeable!

Despite their different locations and functions, all parts of the body are necessary for our health and enrichment. Our human body is indeed the sum of its parts.

Paul transfers this analogy to Christ's Body -- whether it is the local body of Christ, or the universal body of Christ.

In I Corinthians 12:12: “The body is a unit, though it is composed of many parts. And although its parts are many, they all form one body. So it is with Christ.”

Paul is writing this letter to the believers at Rome, the very center of multi-ethnicity in his era. Rome was one of the most cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse places in the world.

As Paul addressed the Church there, he was addressing Jews and Gentiles. He was addressing believers who came from every part of the known world. And he asserts that they are all “one body in Christ”, with various measures of faith and degrees of gifts.

What is the only thing that truly unifies them as believers? It is Christ. It cannot be culture. It cannot be education. It cannot be class hierarchy. It cannot be language. It cannot be occupation.

At the end of verse 5, Paul states that each person in the body of Christ belongs to the rest. He is implying two things:

1. Each is dependent upon the rest for the body of Christ to be healthy.
2. Each is enhanced to the degree that the rest provide what God has gifted them to do.

There is a remarkable message here: Although the church is comprised of a plurality of members – all having unique personalities, talents, perspectives, backgrounds, and occupations – this diversity does not threaten our unity. Instead, it assures our unity because the source is God.

In the next verses, Paul will point out seven gifts that were illustrative of the assertions he has just made. He’s going to show how these gifts make the local church both healthy and interactive.