

12:3 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

In verses 1 and 2 Paul urged believers not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. Verse 3 is an illustration and explanation of the way the new mind is to think. As Moo says, "By connecting this new paragraph to vv. 1–2 with a 'for,' Paul suggests that the exhortations he now gives are concrete instances of the transformed way of life to which the believer is called" (Moo, 760).

Paul begins by telling us how, through the lens of a renewed mind, we should think about ourselves. Because we are completely dependent upon the grace of God, we need to be careful not to overestimate our own importance, as we tend to do. Instead we are to have sound judgment.

Sound judgment is the opposite of pride (12:3); it is a mindset permeated by the awareness that all things (including grace, faith, and spiritual gifts) are gifts from God (12:3–8).

Paul demonstrates sound judgment when he writes of "the grace given to me" (12:3). The grace he is referring to is most likely his gift of apostleship. It is because Paul is an apostle that he has the authority to "say to every man . . ." (that is, he has the right to tell people how they should think as Christians). In fact, apostles held the most authoritative position in the church. They were hand-picked by Christ and designated by Him as His spokesmen. Humanly speaking, it would be easy for someone in this position and with this authority to be proud. But Paul admits that he is what he is by grace alone. Therefore, he has no ground to boast. We should have the same mindset, for our gifts are also "according to the grace given to us" (12:6). Like Paul, we are who we are by grace alone, so boasting is excluded.

At the end of verse 3 Paul says that *God has allotted* to each person a measure of faith; that is, God gave different quantities (measurements) of faith to different people (also see 12:6). Whether we have a lot of faith or a little faith, the amount of faith we have is apportioned to us by God. Recognizing this is sound judgment.

To admit that all we have and all that we are is due to the grace of God is very humbling, but it is not a paralyzing self-condemnation; it is a liberating Christ-exalting mindset that only a renewed mind can grasp.

12:4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function,

12:5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Verses 5–8 expand upon why Christians should not despise or lightly esteem someone else. People with different giftedness are not inferior to others; rather, God designed differences in the church just as He designed differences in the members of the human body.

We were not created new in Christ to live and function independently of each other. We were created as members of a body, as parts that can only fulfill their function as they interact with others. In First

Corinthians 12 Paul says, “the body is not one member, but many” (1 Cor. 12:14) and that “God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired” (1 Cor. 12:18). He then concludes that “the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; or again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary” (1 Cor.12:21–22). The point of the body is that the differentiated gifts don’t compete, nor are some parts superior to others; rather, all the parts are necessary as they work together to move the whole toward perfection. Since all parts are equally indispensable, pride is again excluded.

12:6 And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;

12:7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;

12:8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

In verse 6 Paul stresses that the gifts that each person has are the result of grace; they are unmerited and undeserved. They differ because God’s grace is apportioned differently to each person: He gives to each person the grace He desires. So we shouldn’t boast about what we didn’t earn (12:3), nor should we feel envious for what God hasn’t given us, but rather we should discharge our duties diligently in accordance to what we have received (12:6–8).

In 1 Corinthians 12 God is repeatedly spoken of as the source of spiritual gifts:

- 1 Corinthians 12:7—to each one *is given* the manifestation of the Spirit . . .
- 1 Corinthians 12:11—one and the same *Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills* . . .
- 1 Corinthians 12:18—*God has placed the members*, each one of them, in the body, *just as He desired* . . .
- 1 Corinthians 12:24—*God has so composed* the body. . .
- 1 Corinthians 12:28—*God has appointed* in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

A spiritual gift might be defined as an ability given by God’s grace to every Christian at the time of conversion to empower the believer to serve and build up the body of Christ. Verses 6–8 list seven spiritual gifts: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy.

Prophecy:

OT prophecy differs from NT prophecy in a number of ways.

The significant factor in OT prophecy is that the prophet was to pass the word of the Lord on. The OT prophets often used the expression, “Thus says the Lord.” Their messages were related to the historical context in which they lived, including issues related to social reform (II Sam. 12:1–14; II Sam. 24:10–14; I

Ki. 21:17–26; II Chron. 20:37), unfaithfulness to God (II Chron. 12:1–8; 15:1–8; 16:7–10; 24:17–21), faulty worship (I Ki. 13:1–6; 11:9–38; 14:5–16; 16:1–12; 22:8–28), and the worship of false gods (I Ki. 11:29–38; II Chron. 25:15; II Ki. 3:9–14; 9:1–10; 10:19–28).

NT prophecy is described by Paul in I Corinthians 14:3 as that which is for “strengthening, encouragement, and comfort.” This, however, does not define prophecy, for biblical exposition, prayer, and teaching could also serve the same ends (Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 91), but it does indicate the results it produced.

Grudem (summarized in Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 94 ff.) distinguishes OT and NT prophecy in the following ways:

1. Prophecy presupposes revelation, but NT prophecy is not necessarily in the form of a direct quotation from God. The quotes in the NT that begin, “Thus saith the Lord” are highly disputed and the vast majority of times are clearly a reference to an OT passage, not a NT prophet receiving revelation from God.
2. Those who have authority and status in the NT comparable to the OT prophets were the apostles, not the NT prophets.

Once a prophet was tested and approved in the OT, God’s people were morally bound to obey him. To disobey such a prophet was to oppose God. If a prophet speaking in the name of God was shown to be in error, the official sanction was death. But once a prophet is acknowledged as true, there is no trace of repeated checks on the *content* of his oracles. By contrast, NT prophets are to have their oracles carefully *weighed* (I Cor. 14:29; so also I Thess. 5:19–21). The word διακρίνω (*diakrino*) suggests that the prophecy be *evaluated*, not simply accepted as totally true or totally false. ‘The presupposition is that any one NT prophetic oracle is expected to be *mixed* in quality, and the wheat must be separated from the chaff.’ Moreover, there is no hint of excommunication as the threatened sanction if the prophet occasionally doesn’t live up to the mark. More importantly, Paul places the authority of Christian prophets *under his own* (I Cor. 14:37–38); and to contravene apostolic authority may eventually bring enormous threat (I Cor. 4:21; II Cor. 10:11; 13:1–10; I Tim. 1:20) (Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 94–95).

However, it should be noted that the above statement is a generality. Not all OT prophets enjoyed the same status of the writing prophets (Carson, 98, 160–165).

3. The NT does not see the prophet as replacing the apostle when the apostolic era ended (when all the apostles died). If the NT gift was the same as OT prophecy then one would expect prophets to be the source of revelation and light to the church when combatting false doctrine that continued to threaten the church. Instead the Bible says the following:

- 2 Timothy 1:13 “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.”
- Jude 1:3 “. . . contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”
- 1 John 1:1 “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”

That the NT prophets never enjoyed the authority of the OT prophets is also evidenced in other ways in the NT. The Thessalonians had to be told not to treat prophecy with contempt (I Thess. 5:20), and in Corinthians Paul had to do all he could to advance the gift of prophecy over tongues (I Cor. 13:9; 14:6; Rev. 1:3). The implication is that at times, prophecy was held in contempt and was looked upon as being of lesser value than tongues.

4. There are instances of prophecy thought to be genuinely from God but of much less authority than “Thus saith the Lord.” In Acts 21:4 there were certain disciples who told Paul not to go up to Jerusalem “by the Spirit” (which is almost certainly an expression used of prophecy, cf. Acts 11:28). But Paul goes anyway, believing that the Spirit was prompting him to do so. Likewise, the prophecy of Agabus (Acts 21:10–11) is only accurate in a limited sense. He predicted that the Jews would deliver Paul over to the Gentiles with hands and feet bound. But strictly speaking Paul was bound by the Romans, not the Jews, and the Jews did not hand Paul over but sought to kill him. This is unlike the OT prophets who did not have such inaccuracy in the details.
5. The constraints placed on prophecy in I Corinthians 14:29, 30, 36 show that it is unlike the OT prophets as well. Women were allowed to prophecy (I Cor. 11:5) in the presence of men, but not teach (I Tim. 2:11 ff) or evaluate the content of prophecies (I Cor. 14:33b–36).

It is highly debated if the gift of prophecy is still a functioning gift within the church, and if it is, what it looks like. In the NT it seems to consist of words of comfort and encouragement or it is a general impression of God’s will. In every case it should be evaluated.

Service: The gift of service is a broad gift that focuses on the outer, physical man. People with this gift are concerned with peoples’ physical needs.

Those with the gift of service help behind the scenes to support the ministries of others. They see practical and tangible things to be done and enjoy doing them. They enjoy knowing that they are freeing up others to do what God has called them to do.

Teaching: The gift of teaching is the ability to grasp the meaning of given revelation (the Bible) and explain it effectively and accurately to others. It focuses on the mind.

Those with the gift of teaching give attention to detail and are able to communicate biblical truth in a way that promotes greater understanding and the subsequent transformation of life.

Exhortation: Although teaching can include exhortation, the gift of exhortation differs from the gift of teaching in that it is primarily directed to the heart, conscience, and will rather than the mind. Those who have this gift have the ability to persuade believers to make moral decisions or bring them comfort.

Those with the gift of exhortation have eyes to see people who are discouraged or struggling in their faith. They are able to communicate biblical promises in a way that comforts or urges people to action and growth.

Giving: Although God expects all Christians to be generous with their financial resources, a person with the gift of giving feels a burden to help those with material needs and knows how to use money for spiritual returns.

Those with the gift of giving provide money cheerfully and generously, trusting for God's provision.

Leadership: The word "lead" can also be translated as "have charge" or "manage." This gift is the special ability to help the church grow.

Those with the gift of leadership find it easy to organize and develop strategies for effective ministry. They are able to create order out of chaos and manage both tasks and people well. They are able to see the potential of the church and help people all move in the same direction.

Mercy: The person who has the gift of mercy has a special ability for helping those in mental or physical distress. Such people are compassionate toward those who are hurting. They notice the needy and truly empathize with them; they express love, grace, and dignity to those expressing hardship. They focus on alleviating pain and discomfort in suffering people.

CONCLUSION:

From Romans 12:1–8 we can conclude that if we have experienced the mercies of God, our lives should be transformed in such a way that our God-given gifts are being used in the church to build up the people of God. Each is to use their gifts appropriately. For example, prophets might be tempted to prophesy beyond the ability that God has given them in order to impress others. However, they should only prophesy according to the faith that God has given. This principle applies to every gift. God has given each a measure of faith (12:3) and we are to use our gifts in accord with the measure of faith God has given us.

It is also clear that no one is to allow their gift to stagnate. Discipline and perseverance are needed to use one's gifts for maximum benefit. Once we have identified our gift, we should excel in using it. If someone has the gift of serving, then they should serve. The teacher should teach, the one who has the gift of exhortation should be encouraging others, and the one who gives should do so with liberality (not with ulterior motives or begrudgingly). The one who leads should do so with zeal (not half-heartedly), and the one who shows mercy should do so cheerfully (not reluctantly or patronizingly).

Although believers should devote themselves to using the gift that they have received, this does not mean, for example, that if we are gifted in leading we should neglect serving or showing mercy; it means that the leader should not neglect leading.

God has not only saved us; He has equipped us to serve Him, serve others, and bring Him glory.