

# Romans

## Bible Study

### Body of Christ

#### Romans 12:3–5

After first showing our hopeless condition and then God's great love and grace in Romans 1—11, Paul tells us that it is only reasonable for us to give our lives back to God as a living sacrifice. We do this by transforming our thinking so that we will not conform to this world. Our minds are naturally geared to think according to the natural man, the old nature, but we need to transform our thinking by renewing the mind so that we focus upon spiritual thoughts. We are to rise above this world and concentrate on the spiritual so that we will have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). Having the mind of Christ means that we will think like Him, which is the only way that we are able to please Him. This is accomplished by infusing ourselves with His word, the Bible, and allowing the Holy Spirit to activate the word of God within our lives.

In contrast to the spiritually minded person is the worldly minded person. We were once living in this manner with no hope of understanding spiritual things and living a completely carnal life (Colossians 3:5—10). After we were saved, when the Holy Spirit came to dwell within us, we were enabled to understand spiritual concepts, and we were given the ability to stop thinking carnal thoughts (1 Corinthians 2:14—15). This only happens when we change our thinking. We are to let the word of God richly dwell within us, causing us to change our way of thinking and conform to the mind of Christ (Colossians 3:16). When we do this, we who are members of the Body of Christ will come together as one and effectively work together for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27; 1 Corinthians 1:10).

The transformation we experience by the renewing of our mind is the only way that we are able to understand and prove (discern) what God's will is for us today. God didn't leave us here without giving us the guidance and tools we need to live for Him. Not only has He revealed His will for us in Paul's 13 epistles, but He also has given us the Holy Spirit who gives us wisdom as we make decisions that are not specifically addressed in Scripture. Once we understand what God wants us to do (by studying how He expects us to live, according to Pauline doctrine) then we are able to boldly live our lives for Him. Those who are unsure of what God's will is for their lives will continually be unsure of themselves, always wondering if they are doing the right thing. We will be most useful to the Lord when we understand how we should live, realizing that we have been given a great area of freedom in deciding how we are to serve Him.

Romans 12—16 contains many practical principles in applying what was presented in the earlier chapters of Romans. God's will for us today is encapsulated within these practical examples.

#### **Edification of the saints**

Paul has been showing us how to be productive members of the Church, the Body of Christ. In Romans 12:5 Paul introduces us to the concept of being members of a body. Everything we learned previously to this is to be applied with every other believer in mind. A big part of serving the Lord is accomplished when we serve each other. Verses 3–8 introduce us to using our abilities for each other's benefit.

This concept of living and thinking about others is usually contrary to how we live our life. From birth, the world seems to be no larger than a five foot circle around ourselves. Once we learn that crying and making a fuss gets us what we want, we continue to use this method for our benefit. We have no time to think about others because we are so busy thinking about what we need and want. Even after getting saved, most churches actually encourage their congregants to live selfish, self-centered lives by preaching a message stating that God loves you and that He sent His Son and died thinking only of you. We hear sermon after sermon focusing on God's immense love and how He chases after you (recklessly!) when you stray from Him. Pastors often drive home the point that God is there for you. The goal seems to be giving those who attend an experience and the feeling of worship but without all that biblical doctrine.

Paul, by the Holy Spirit, shows us that right thinking involves being concerned about the needs of others. He lists abilities given to believers that are to be used exclusively for the edification of other believers. He shows us that we need to expand our circle to care for each other, and even to meet the needs of unbelievers (Gal 6:10; Phil 2:3–4). Chapters 1–11 of Romans culminates with the concept that serving God entails edifying of the Body of Christ. To edify is to build up—helping another believer to grow up in Christ. Every member of the Body is responsible to be sensitive to the needs of others and help them not only in their spiritual growth, but also with their physical and emotional needs. This is God’s will for the believer.

### **God’s provision (verse 3)**

As always, God has supplied us with everything necessary for us to meet the needs of the Body of Christ. Notice what Paul says in verse 3. God has dealt, or distributed the “measure of faith.” This phrase is often understood to mean that God is distributing faith. In this case, however, it seems that the measure of faith is about our growth and understanding of God’s word. God has given to everyone the opportunity to know and understand His word. God deals with people, particularly believers, according to his or her understanding, which is their measure of faith.

Ephesian 4:7 might help to clear this up: “But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” This grace, in context, would be the gifts given to the Church, the Body of Christ, to edify the Body (verses 11–12), with the goal of bringing all believers to unity of the faith and of the knowledge of God (verse 13). The only source of growth for the believer today comes from God’s word and the work of the Holy Spirit. When we come to know Scripture we will no longer be as children being tossed by every wind of doctrine (verse 14). Notice that grace was given equally to all believers according to the (unlimited) measure of God’s gift, His Son (Romans 8:32; Ephesians 1:6–8).

Note that we are to grow up into the unity of the faith, having the same understanding and knowledge of Scripture, rightly divided. God does not give us this faith, but it is acquired through study and the work of the Holy Spirit. That means the measure of faith in Romans 12 is spiritual growth through the study of Scripture. God deals, or portions out, the gifts to members of the Body of Christ according to the individual’s understanding of Scripture. As we study God’s word, we will grow in the faith and come to understand the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). We will then have sound judgment in evaluating ourselves so that we do not think more highly of ourselves than we should. This new, transformed way of thinking, which comes from the study of Scripture (rightly divided) and the work of the Holy Spirit, is absolutely necessary in order for us to become a productive member of the Body of Christ. If we think too highly (or too much) of ourselves, we will not be as capable in reaching out to meet the needs of others.

For instance, how many times have we heard someone say that they don’t go to church because they don’t get anything out of the sermon? People who do this are only thinking of themselves. They are coming to church for their own edification but not looking for opportunities to edify those around them. A mature believer would come to church looking for opportunities to satisfy the needs of other members of the Body of Christ. They would realize that one of the main reasons for coming together is so that they can look for ways to edify those around them.

### **Body of Christ (verses 4–5)**

Verse 3 speaks of having sound judgement when we evaluate ourselves and not to think we are overly important. Verses 4–5 put this into the context of believers being joined as a cohesive group called the Body of Christ. Just as our bodies have many different members, so too does the Church, the Body of Christ. Just as the members of our bodies are different with distinct functions, so too is the Church, the Body of Christ. Just as the members of our body all work together to accomplish a function, so too should the Church, the Body of Christ. We are all members of the Body and members of each other.

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