

THE BELIEVER AND HIMSELF

ROMANS 12:03–08

Introduction

After looking at the subject of the believer and God, the believer needs to look at the subject of himself. He needs to see what the exhortation of God is to him personally. God directs two forceful charges to the believer personally.

- I. Think highly of yourself, but not too highly (vv. 3-5).
- II. Use the gifts God has given you (vv. 6-8).

I. Romans 12:03–05 Humility

The believer is to think of himself, but not too highly. The exhortation is directed to “*every one* of you.” Every believer needs to work at humility. There is a tendency within many persons to think too highly of themselves. Too many become conceited, prideful and arrogant. They become *puffed up* with their own...

- importance
- wealth
- looks
- possessions
- popularity
- opinions
- education
- position
- ability
- goodness
- performance
- title

There are too many who esteem themselves too highly and who think of themselves as *better* than others. God stands against such *puffed up* attitudes.

1. Think of yourself, but think *soberly* (sophronein). The word means to be balanced, sane, in one’s right mind. Therefore, the exhortation is to think of oneself wisely and accurately, making a sane and well-balanced evaluation of one’s person and abilities. An evaluation of oneself should be made, but it should be a sober and sane judgment, not an insane, imbalanced judgment. Note how strong this is: thinking too highly of oneself is an insane thought. Thinking that one is more important than someone else is insane behaviour. Every person is important to God: every person is meaningful and significant to God’s kingdom, no matter who the person is.
2. The reasons why we are to live humbly before others are clearly spelled out.
 - a. What we are and have has come from God. It is God who has given each believer “the measure of faith.” The word “faith” in the context of these verses means a *working faith*. It includes both...
 - the gifts and abilities God gives to a person
 - the faith and drive or confidence to use the gifts

Very simply, a *working faith* is the ability and drive within a person to get to it and to serve God, to make his contribution to life and society. Another way to say the same

thing is this: the measure of faith (v. 3) and the proportion of faith (v. 6) mean the spiritual gift and power which God gives to each believer for his special task on earth. Very simply, everything a person is and has comes from God. Nothing comes from man himself. Therefore, no person has reason to think too highly of himself.

James 1:17 *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

1 Cor 4:7 *For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

Note another fact as well: what we have received from God is *only a measure*. No person has a full measure of anything. No person is perfected in any area. We all age, deteriorate and decay. We all have to move aside eventually for others, no matter what our abilities and contributions. We have no reason to think too highly of ourselves.

Eph 4:7 *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.*

- b. God gifts *every person*, not just one person nor just a few persons. Note that God deals to *every person* a measure of faith. No person or persons have a monopoly on any gift or ability. Every single believer has been gifted by God; not a single believer has been omitted by God. One believer is as important to God as any other believer, no matter who the believer may be. There is no room for pride and arrogance in the Kingdom of God, no place for thinking that one is more important than others. Such thoughts are insane.
- c. Genuine believers are *one body* in Christ. This is the most beautiful picture of the body of Christ in Scripture; and because of its effectiveness, it is often used (see 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12f; 12:27; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:4, 15-16; 5:22f; Col. 1:18, 24).

Believers can be compared to the human body. The human body has many parts or members, and no two members have the same function. So it is with believers. Believers are many, yet they are one body *in Christ*. Every single believer has a distinct function to fulfil in the world, yet he is a member of all other believers. It should be noted that the believer's union is not organizational. It is not the same kind of unity that exists in a civic or social club, which is a unity based upon such things as friendship, preference, neighbourhood, profession, human need, opinion or organization. The union between genuine believers is born of the Spirit of God, of a true *spiritual birth and union*. It is a union that is in constant and intimate fellowship with God and that draws its life and purpose and meaning and significance from God. The union between genuine believers is a union that is *quickened and made alive* by a common Spirit, a Spirit that truly lives, the Holy Spirit of God Himself.

The point is clearly stated: all members do not have the same *function* (praxis). God has set the believer in the world for a specific purpose, and God has gifted the believer

with whatever measure of faith is needed to fulfil his function. The believer is a member or a part of the whole body, with each member having his task to perform. There is no room for self-elevation, pride or arrogance — no room for thinking too highly of self. The believer does not stand alone in the world. Every believer has a measure of faith to do his task, and every member is needed to get the task done. Therefore, no believer has the right to think of himself more highly than any other believer. Every single believer is important to the *body of Christ*. Every believer is needed to complete, fulfil and perfect the body. The body becomes handicapped without the active functioning of every member. Every member is very important.

The point is this: believers are to evaluate and know themselves well. They are to know who they are and the gifts which God has given them. They are to evaluate the measure of faith God has given and they are to be honest and accurate in their evaluation. They are not to over evaluate nor to under-evaluate. A believer's judgment about himself must be accurate and wise in order to accomplish his task upon earth.

Thought 1. Only as we know ourselves — accurately, honestly and truthfully — can we make the contribution we should to our families, jobs, society, church and the world. Only as we serve to our full capacity can we fulfil our task on earth.

=> If we think too highly of ourselves, we attempt too much and end up failing.

=> If we think too little of ourselves, we never do as much as we could nor make the contributions that we could have made.

Phil 2:3-4 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Luke 14:10 *“But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honoured in the presence of all your fellow guests.”*

Luke 22:26 *“But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.”*

James 4:10 *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

1 Pet 5:5 *Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

Prov 22:4 *Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honour and life.*

Prov 29:23 *A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honour.*

Thought 2. God gifts the believer with a certain measure of spiritual gifts; therefore, the believer is to use whatever measure of faith he has to use his gifts for God. However, the believer should always be praying for more and more faith.

Luke 17:5 “Lord, increase our faith!”

Mark 9:24 [Lord], “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

Rom 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

II. Romans 12:06–08 Spiritual Gifts

The believer is to use the gifts God has given him. The word *gift* (charisma) means the very special ability given to the believer by God. Note that the gift is from God; it is not a natural talent. The believer could not have attained nor secured the ability himself. It is a spiritual gift; that is, it is given by the Spirit of God for spiritual purposes. It is given to the believer so that he can fulfill his task on earth.

Note also that the gifts are said to be given “according to the grace given us”. This means that the gifts are given after we come to know the *grace* of God. This is part of our *heritage in Christ*, the glorious privilege...

- of being given a very special task upon earth.
- of being given purpose and meaning and significance in life.
- of being given a very special gift or gifts to fulfil our task on earth.

Now, what are the gifts? Several are singled out in this passage (see 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 12:12-31; 13:1-13; Eph. 4:7-16).

1. There is the *gift of prophecy*. In the Old Testament the gift of prophecy was the gift to proclaim and explain the will of God. The proclamation dealt with past, present and future events. However, in the New Testament, the gift of prophecy changes dramatically. The prophet is seldom seen predicting the future. Instead, he is seen proclaiming what has taken place in the Lord Jesus Christ and what has been *revealed by Christ* concerning future events. His function is to edify, exhort and comfort. The Scripture is clear about this.

1 Cor 14:3 But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

The prophet is the man who proclaims and explains the Word of God...

- the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself
- the written Word, the Holy Scripture

Having said this, it should be noted that prophecy is the gift of speaking under the inspiration of God's Spirit. It includes both prediction and proclamation, and neither one should be minimized despite the abuse of the gift.

There is no question, the gift to predict events has been abused to the point of the ridiculous. However, the abuse of a gift does not eliminate the gift: the Spirit of God does sometimes give believers a glimpse into coming events in order to prepare and strengthen them to face the events.

However, the major function of prophecy is clearly stated by Scripture, and the fact should be learned by all believers:

1 Cor 14:3 But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

Thought 1. Note a crucial point. A prophet of the Lord Jesus Christ must first know Jesus Christ before he can proclaim the good news about Jesus Christ. How can a man tell the world about Someone when he does not know the person himself?

2. There is the *gift of serving* (diakonia). The word is often used of a servant or of a person who serves and ministers to others in the most practical ways. Therefore, the meaning would be the very special ability to serve, minister, aid, help and assist others – to assist them in such a way that they are *built up* and truly helped. It is the most practical of gifts. Most of us know a few people who are always willing and who are unusually gifted to help others when help is needed. All of us can help, and all of us can develop our willingness and ability to help, but there are some believers who are unusually gifted with the very special gift of serving.

Mat 10:42 “And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”

Gal 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Phil 2:5-7 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

3. There is the *gift of teaching* (didaskon). Teaching is the ability to explain, root and ground people in the truth. The Word of God not only needs to be proclaimed by the prophet, but it must also be explained by the teacher. People must be guided and rooted in all the truths of the Word day by day, week by week and year by year. This is the teacher's task.

Thought 1. How desperately the church needs good, solid leaching. People are walking out the back door of the church almost as fast as they are coming in the front door, all because they are not rooted and grounded in Christ.

1 Cor 12:28 *And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.*

Eph 4:11 *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.*

Mat 28:20 *“And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

4. There is the gift of *encouragement* (parakalesei). This is the very special ability to excite, motivate, advise, exhort, comfort and warn people. The dominant factor would be the motivation and encouragement of people, the ability to stir people to make a decision for Christ and to grow in Him. It is the gift that arouses people to get up and get busy fulfilling their task for the Lord.

2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.*

Titus 1:9 *He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*

Titus 2:11-15 *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.*

5. There is the *gift of giving* (metadidomi). This simply means the giving of one’s earthly possessions such as money, clothing and food. Note that in listing this particular gift, Scripture adds a point: it tells how the person is to give. He is to give *generously* (haplotetes). The word has several ideas. It means...
- to give with sincerity and in simplicity.
 - to give with singleness of heart and without show.
 - to give liberally and generously.

The point is this: God gives some persons the special gift to make money in order to have plenty to help others and to spread the gospel around the world. These persons...

- must give and give generously. God gave them the gift of making money in order to have enough to fulfil the will of God for the world. Therefore, they must give liberally.
- must not hoard and bank and misuse their gift of wealth.
- must not give grudgingly and complainingly about having to give.
- must not give to attract attention or to heap honour upon themselves.
- must not give to boost their own egos and pride.

Mat 6:3 “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”

1 Cor 16:2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

2 Cor 9:7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

6. There is the gift of *leadership* (proistemi). This means the ability of leadership, authority, administration, government. Note that this person is to lead with *diligence* (spoude): with haste, zeal, desire and concentrated attention. There is no room for laziness, complacency and irresponsibility in the Kingdom of God and His church. The leaders are the ones who are to blaze the path for the flock of God, and they are to do it with zeal, hard work and iron determination.

Rom 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.

1 Pet 5:2-3 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

7. There is the *gift of mercy* (eleon). This is a person who is full of forgiveness and compassion, pity and kindness toward others. Note that the merciful person is to show mercy with a *cheerful* (hilarotes) heart. The word means kind, cheerful, joyful. The person with the gift of mercy...
- is not to forgive grudgingly.
 - is not to hesitate in forgiving others.
 - is not to show mercy in an annoyed spirit.
 - is not to show mercy in a spirit of criticism and rebuke toward the person who needs help. (This often happens when the person is down and out because of unemployment, lack of education or some other unfortunate circumstance.)

The believer who has the spirit of mercy is to show mercy with a cheerful and joyful heart, doing all he can to lift up the person needing mercy.

Mat 5:7 *“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*

Luke 6:36 *“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”*

Hosea 12:6 *But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.*

Micah 6:8 *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. ■*