

LIFE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST: A STUDY ON ROMANS 12:1-8

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Introduction

It has been taught in adult Sunday School classes that an easy way to remember where to find what the Bible says about spiritual gifts is twelve-twelve-four-four. That is, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. The passage that concerns us in this study is the first of these four. While Romans 12:6-8 has always served as the proof text for the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church today,¹ Romans 12:1-2 is one of the best-known passages in the New Testament.² So, public reading of the passage often stops at 12:2, or starts at 12:4. This makes 12:3 pretty much a "stand alone" verse.

This paper will consider Romans 12:1-8 as a whole, and will argue that, contrary to those who take Romans 12:6-8 as a proof text for the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church, Paul's main concern here in vv.6-8 is not teaching about the exercise of spiritual gifts *per se*, although it may be secondary. Rather, Paul's chief concern here is the life of believers (Jews and Gentiles at his time, and all believers at present) in the Body of

¹Cf. John Koenig, "Charismata: God's Gifts for God's People" in *Biblical Perspectives on Current Issues*, gen. ed. Howard Clark Kee (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 94. Koenig writes, "When participants in current movements for spiritual renewal confront such questions (what are the special gifts called charismata, and what makes them so special), they generally appeal to the four major "lists" of charismata found in I Cor., chs. 12-14; Rom. 12:6ff.; Eph. 4:7ff.; and I Peter 4:10f."

²Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* ed. Gordon D. Fee (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 748.

Christ as a whole, but especially in the local church setting, after the believers are justified and adopted into the family of God, and now growing together in grace. This endeavor will be carried out by the exegesis of the passage while considering the immediate context of the passage (the epistle to the Romans) and Pauline epistles in general.

The exegesis, it is hoped, will then shed light on some of the notable theological issues in the passage, which will then support the exegesis. When we have come full circle, we shall have shown that Paul is teaching about what life in the Body of Christ is like for believers who are renewed in mind. To that end, we begin with the translation of the passage.

Romans 12:1-8: Translation

Text	Translation
1. Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ παραστήσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν	<i>Therefore, I exhort¹ you, brothers, because of the mercy of God,⁴ to offer your bodies as a sacrifice,</i>

¹Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 765. Other renderings include "beseech" (KJV), "appeal to" (RSV, ESV, Amplified NT), "urge" (NIV), "plead with" (NLT, Living NT). Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 748, writes, "The English verb 'exhort' captures well the nuance of the Greek *parakaleō* in contexts such as this." While Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, ed. Moisés Silva (BECNT 6; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 642, argues that Paul here is not merely giving good advice or personal opinions, but it is the authoritative will of God, hence "beseech" or "implore" are not strong enough. In the same vein, C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans*, 2 vols, (ICC; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 2: 597. N.T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans* (The Interpreter's Bible 10; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 703, thinks "implore" (NEB, REB) "sounds like a desperate and emotional begging." He prefers "appeal" (RSV, NRSV) to "urge" (NIV, NJB).

⁴For the use of διὰ here, see BDAG 3f, 225. Also, Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 91-92. Some render the genitive plural οἰκτιρμῶν as "by the mercies of God" (KJV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, ESV, Amplified), but Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 20 n.20, whose translation reflects the plural in Greek, suggests with others (Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," 647. For the "double service" of "this aeon" as time-scheme and world-

ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ ἣν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν *which is living, holy, and pleasing to God,⁶ to be your true worship.⁶*

2 καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει *And do not conform⁷ to this age,⁸ but be transformed by the renewal*

Romans", 703), correctly I think, that the word has a singular meaning, because "Paul picks up the plural form from the LXX, which uses it to translate a plural Hebrew word (עֲבֹדָה)." For διὰ, he also prefers the renderings "because of" (TEV) or "in view of" (NIV). Cf. James D.G. Dunn, *Romans*, ed. Ralph P. Martin (WBC 38; Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 2: 709. Suggests an instrumental force for διὰ here.

⁶Some manuscripts read τῷ θεῷ εὐάρεστον, different from NA²⁷ and UBS⁴ where no textual variant is shown, but this does not alter the sense. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 648 and Dunn, *Romans*, 2:707. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 751 n.31, points out, as we render it here, that all three adjectives follow the noun they modify. Most translations (KJV, Amplified, Living NT, NIV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, ESV) put "living" before "sacrifice," hence "give it a prominence that Paul does not." Along the same vein, Schreiner, *Romans*, 644 and Cranfield, *Romans*, 2: 600.

⁷Bauer et. al., BDAG, 598, offers the rendering "thoughtful service." Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 751-53, admits of the difficulty to provide a satisfactory rendering, and after considering the alternatives, he concludes that the usual rendering "spiritual" (NIV, NASB, NRSV, RSV, ESV, Amplified) and "reasonable" (KJV) miss the mark, and in light of v.2, he proposes to follow TEV ("true worship"). The addition of "to be" in my opinion will show that this phrase is in apposition to the whole sentence, not only to the sacrifice, as Schreiner, *Romans*, 644-645, and others point out. Cf. NLT "This is truly the way to worship him." David Peterson, "Worship and Ethics in Romans 12," *Tyndale Bulletin* 44: 2 (1993) cautions against translating "spiritual worship," as accenting the inwardness of Christian worship and not taking sufficient account of yielding our bodies to God's service.

⁸Many manuscripts read συσχηματίζεσθαι and μεταμορφοῦσθαι (infinitive), but the imperative reading has stronger external evidence and it is more difficult, hence less likely to be scribal improvement. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 648 and Dunn, *Romans*, 2: 707. The voice is passive, but it could be rendered passive ("do not be conformed," KJV, NASB, NRSV, RSV, ESV, Amplified), middle ("do not conform yourselves," TEV), or active ("do not conform," NIV, REB, NJB, or as NLT renders it "do not copy").

⁹Most translations (KJV, RSV, NIV, ESV, NLT) render αἰῶν as "world." The Amplified NT provides an alternate reading "this age," as is Schreiner,

τοῦ νοῦς εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ἡμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον.

of your mind' in order that you may approve what the will of God is, that which is good and pleasing and perfect.

3. Λέγω γὰρ διὰ τῆς χάριτος τῆς δοθείσης μοι παντὶ τῷ ὄντι ἐν ὑμῖν μὴ ὑπερφρονεῖν παρ' ὃ δεῖ φρονεῖν ἀλλὰ φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν, ἐκάστῳ ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἐμέρισεν μέτρον πίστεως.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but think so as to think soberly,¹⁰ as God has apportioned to each a quantity of faith.¹¹

4. καθάπερ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι πολλὰ μέλη ἔχομεν, τὰ δὲ μέλη πάντα οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει πρᾶξιν,

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

5. οὕτως οἱ πολλοὶ ἐν σώματι ἴσμεν ἐν Χριστῷ, τὸ δὲ καθ' εἰς ἀλλήλων μέλη.

So also we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually¹³ members of one another.

scheme, see the discussion in Geerhardus Vos, "Chapter 1. The Structure of Pauline Eschatology" in *The Pauline Eschatology* (n.p., 1930), 12ff.

¹⁰Some texts have ἡμῶν after τοῦ νοῦς, but the external evidence is inferior, and it is also an easier reading. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 648, also Dunn, *WBC: Romans*, 707. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans", 705, is certainly right in saying that "whether or not this is original, it is certainly the sense," as seen in ESV, NIV, KJV, RSV, etc.

¹¹See BDAG 1034; Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*, 172. There is a play on words noted by many, but, as Moo, *Romans*, 760, noted, this paronomasia is difficult to bring out in the translations.

¹²Schreiner, *Romans*, 652-653, argues that the use of the verb ἐμέρισεν with the noun μέτρον suggests that the latter refers to a "measure" or "quantity" of something and that the phrase relates to the apportioning of an amount of faith. Most translations (ESV, NIV, RSV, KJV) render the phrase as "measure of faith," yet the resultant meaning is ambiguous. Moo, *Romans*, 762, on the other hand, believes that πίστew is genitive of apposition, hence "our faith is the measure" (emphasis original). Faith is the standard against which each believer estimates himself.

¹³BDAG 859.

¹⁴BDAG 512(3a).

6. ἔχοντες δὲ χαρίσματα κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν διάφορα, εἴτε προφητείαν κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως,

And we have different gifts according to the grace given to us, if (one has the gift of) prophecy, (let him prophecy)¹⁴ according to the proportion of faith,

7. εἴτε διακονίαν ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ, εἴτε ὁ διδάσκων ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ,

If (one has the gift of) service, (let him use it) in service;¹⁵ if (one has the gift of) one who teaches, (let him use it) in teaching,

8. εἴτε ὁ παρακαλῶν ἐν τῇ παρακλήσει, ὁ μεταδιδούς ἐν ἀπλότητι, ὁ προϊστάμενος ἐν σπουδῇ, ὁ ἐλεῶν ἐν ἰλαρότητι.

If (one has the gift of) one who exhorts, (let him use it) in exhortation; (if one has the gift of)¹⁶ one who shares, (let him use it) in generosity;¹⁷ (if one has the gift of) one who leads,¹⁸ (let him use

¹⁴Moo, *Romans*, 763-764, asserts that the qualification of each gifts reflects a hortatory sense (KJV, NIV, ESV, NLT, RSV, NASB, TEV, Amplified), while the indicative rendering (NRSV) he thinks is out of place. Further, he prefers to treat ἔχοντες as circumstantial participle rather than causal. The ellipsis of verbs is assumed as is common in Greek.

¹⁵Moo, *Romans*, 767 n.49, thinks "the ἐν indicates manner."

¹⁶Moo, *Romans*, 767 n.54, suggests that although the introductory particle εἴτε is dropped, its sense remains in force.

¹⁷BDAG, 104, points out that this sense is in dispute and suggests that "simplicity" in the sense of "sincere concern" or "simple goodness" is sufficient. But Moo, *Romans*, 768, points out that when used of giving, the meaning shades over into "generosity" and he cites *Silva* (n.59) who suggests that this may be partly due to Semitic influence. Probably "generosity" makes more sense in the context than "simplicity."

¹⁸BDAG, 870, gives the original sense of "rule, direct, be at the head," yet due to its position between μεταδιδούς and ἐλεῶν, the meaning becomes "show concern for, care for, give aid." Moo, *Romans*, 768, however, disagrees, since this meaning is not well-attested for this verb, and suggests instead that it be translated as "one who presides." Schreiner, *Romans*, 660, in the same vein contends that "it is not apparent ...that the surrounding terms necessarily cast light on what a particular word means."

it) with diligence.¹⁹ (if one has the gift of) one who shows mercy, (let him use it) with cheerfulness.²⁰

Romans 12:1-8 and Its Context

Romans 12 begins with "therefore" (translated from Greek, οὖν) and Käsemann²¹ suggests that this conjunction is only a transitional particle, which, for Peterson, implies that there is "no important logical or inner connection between what precedes and what follows."²² Contrary to this view, other commentators contend that this conjunction carries a lot of weight, as Cranfield puts it, "What is going to be said follows from what has already been said." The implication of this, Cranfield observes, is twofold: (1) Christian obedience is a grateful response to what God has done in Christ, and (2) all truly Christian moral effort springs from the saving deed of God.²³ Or in the light of discourse analysis, it can be said that "therefore" (οὖν) introduces the conclusion proposition in a grounds-CONCLUSION relation, suggesting that, semantically, the conclusion could be more prominent than the grounds.²⁴ Such is the importance of such a little word.

The consequent question is then how far back does the "grounds" reach? Some commentators go only as far back as 11:35-36,²⁵ or slightly

¹⁹BDAG, 939, gives the domain of meaning as "eagerness, earnestness, diligence, willingness, zeal."

²⁰BDAG, 473, suggests: "cheerfulness, gladness, wholeheartedness, graciousness."

²¹Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 326.

²²Peterson, "Worship and Ethics," 279.

²³Cranfield, *Romans*, 595, also Peterson, "Worship and Ethics," 280; Dunn, *Romans*, 708; Schreiner, *Romans*, 639; Moo, *Romans*, 748; Young, *Intermediate Greek*, 191, writes, "The οὖν in Romans 12:1 draws the conclusion from the previous eleven chapters of Romans." Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 673, takes οὖν to be an inferential conjunction, the use of which is to give a deduction, conclusion, or summary to the preceding discussion.

²⁴Young, *Intermediate Greek*, 191, 260.

²⁵H. A. W. Meyer, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1884) as cited in Moo, *Romans*, 748 n.17.

further to 11:28-36.²⁶ Others link the conjunction with chapters 5 or 6 to 8,²⁷ while some add chapters 9-11 to 5-8.²⁸ Still others, more convincingly, join the exhortation with the arguments of the entire epistle preceding 12:1.²⁹ Cranfield argues for this last position on two grounds: (1) linguistically, although the Greek words translated "mercy" (ὀικτιρμόν, ἔλεος) are absent from the first eight chapters, and they are more concentrated in chapters 9-11 than elsewhere in Pauline epistles, hence it may be suggested that Paul is thinking only of chapters 9-11, yet "the whole of 1:18-11:36 is concerned with the action of the merciful God." Therefore "the reality of the mercy of God is never far from Paul's thought." (2) It is intrinsically more probable that Paul bases his exhortation on the whole of what he has written so far than on chapters 9-11 only.

²⁶M. A. Seifried, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme*. Supplements to Novum Testamentum 68 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 191, as cited in Schreiner, *Romans*, 639 n.2.

²⁷H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief Kommentar*. HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1977) and Dieter Zeller, *Der Brief an die Römer*. RNT (Regensburg: Pustet, 1985) as cited in Moo, *Romans*, 748 n.17. Also, John K. Ridgway, "By the Mercies of God: Mercy and Peace in Romans 12," *Irish Biblical Studies* 14: 4 (1992), 170-191.

²⁸Dunn, *Romans*, 708, also Wilckens (1982) 2, as cited in Schreiner, *Romans*, 639 n.2.

²⁹Wright, "The Letter to the Romans", 700; Moo, *Romans*, 748, writes, "Paul wants to show that the exhortations of 12:1-15:13 are built firmly on the theology of chaps. 1-11." Schreiner, *Romans*, 639, argues, "The οὖν commencing 12:1 harks back all the way to 1:16-11:36." John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 2:110, suggests that "it would not be feasible to exclude the whole more doctrinal parts of the epistle, especially the part devoted to sanctification, from that which underlies the 'therefore' of 12:1." F. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. A. Cusin, rev. and ed. Talbot W. Chambers (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), 424, proposes that the true connection with what precedes is nothing less than the relation between the two parts of the Epistle. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), 351, contends that "the οὖν refers not so much to what immediately precedes as to the result of the whole previous argument." Peterson, "Worship and Ethics," 279-80, observes that, "Behind Romans 9-11 stand the first eight chapters."

If, indeed, the “therefore” reaches back to the beginning of the epistle, and is the conclusion of the foregoing arguments, and if Young’s assertion is correct, that the conclusion could be more prominent than the grounds, then in light of 12:1ff., Romans 1-11 might be read as a building up of arguments towards the conclusion in Romans 12:1ff.³⁰ It is to be seen, as Moo suggests, as a transition “from a focus on the ‘indicative’ side of the gospel to a focus more on the ‘imperative’ side of the gospel,” yet both are the two sides of the same coin. It is definitely not a transition from “theology” to “practice.”³¹ Since it is futile, as Murray argues in the same vein, to give practical exhortation apart from the spring from which compliance must flow, namely union with Christ in his death and resurrection, as ethics must be based on the redemptive accomplishment in Christ,³² as Paul expounded on the latter in Romans 1-11. It is through this lens that we attempt to read the preceding context of Romans 12:1-8 now.

In the opening sentence of this epistle, the apostle Paul proclaims that he is set apart for the gospel of God and has received grace and apostleship to call people to obedience that comes from faith (1:1, 5), and that this gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, Jews as well as Gentiles (1:16). For they do not worship nor serve God as Creator although they know him (1:21), on the contrary, they worship and serve created things (1:25), and hence God gives them over to their sinful desires and they store up God’s wrath against themselves (2:5). In his faithfulness, God then reveals a righteousness apart from the law through

³⁰Within the section started with Romans 12:1, namely 12:1-15:13, we can further divide the passage, as shown below. Interestingly, Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, 702, characterizes this point in the epistle as reaching the summit of the mountain range, as Paul has completed the main structure of the letter, and the journey now continues without the strenuous work of climbing, but still with a sense of continuity in the aim and goal. However, we may not concur with him that what follows “therefore” is about results, *not* process. Since, as Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:109, puts it, “That the apostle is concerned with the subject of sanctification is evident from the outset,” and sanctification is *both* a result (of justification) *and* a process.

³¹Moo, *Romans*, 745.

³²Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:109-110.

faith in Jesus Christ (3:22), because under law no one is righteous and because Christ is presented as a sacrifice of atonement (3:20, 25). Having been justified through faith in Christ, we³³ have peace with God through Christ (5:1), whose righteousness brings life for all men (5:18) and with whom we have been united in his death and resurrection (6:5). Thus we can now offer ourselves in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness, and the result is eternal life (6:19, 22). Yet we grapple with the fact that in our mind we are a slave to God's law, but in our sinful nature we are a slave to the law of sin (7:25). Now through Christ, the law of the Spirit of life sets us free from the law of sin and death (8:2), because the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in us (8:11). This does not depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy (9:16), so much so that the Gentiles, who do not pursue righteousness have attained it by faith (9:30). For that reason, there is now no difference between Jew and Gentile as the same Lord is Lord of all (10:12). Just as the Gentiles who have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so the Jews too have now become disobedient in order that they may receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to the Gentiles (11:30). Praise be to God!

After familiarizing ourselves to the preceding context, we can now turn our attention to the subsequent context (12:9ff.). Many commentators divide the last five chapters of this epistle into two units: 12:1-15:13 and 15:14-16:27.³⁴ The latter is the conclusion of the epistle, included in which is Paul's ministry to the Gentiles with his policy and plans, and his greetings and closing doxology. The former is subdivided into two parts: 12:1-13:14 and 14:1-15:13. Wright sees the first part being more general and the second more specific. He sees 12:1-2 as the introduction and foundation; 12:3-13 as discussing unity in the church through each exercising their gifts; 12:14-21 as discussing church's life facing those outside; 13:1-7 as responsibility

³³There is a change of pronoun from 3rd person plural in chapter 1 to 2nd person singular in chapter 2 to 1st person plural in chapter 3, where Paul joins his readers in their union with Christ.

³⁴Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*; Cranfield, *Romans*; Moo, *Romans*; Schreiner, *Romans*; Dunn, *Romans*; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*.

toward authorities; 13:8-10 as discussing the overriding responsibility of love, and 13:11-14 as discussing about living in the light of God's dawning day.³⁵ Then the second part dwells mainly on Paul's specific exhortation regarding the relationship between the weak and the strong in faith among the believers. With this orientation on the surroundings, we are now ready to delve into our passage proper.

Exegesis of Romans 12:1-8

Romans 12:1-2

Paul addresses the recipients of his exhortation as "brothers" (ἀδελφοί),³⁶ to accentuate the heightening of the sense of intimacy with them as he takes up the pastoral task of exhortation.³⁷ Although, as Cranfield points out, it is unwise to conclude here that its only function is to mark the beginning of a new main division, this vocative does point to the seriousness of Paul's exhortation with a change of tone by means of the vocative and entering into a new division marked by "therefore" (οὖν), the significance of which has been discussed above under "Context."

After connecting to the previous context and addressing his recipients, Paul goes on to indicate what he is going to do is "to exhort" (παρακαλῶ) them. Although Murray points out that this introductory word must not be overlooked, he sees it as no more than "the appeal of loving relationship,"³⁸

³⁵Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, 702. Dunn, *Romans*, 706 sees a chiasm of *abcdcba* in 12:1-15:6 where *a* is 12:1-2 (the basis for responsible living other than the law); *b* is 12:3-8 (the body of Christ as the social expression of God's people); *c* is 12:9-21 (love as the fundamental moral imperative in human relationships); *d* is 13:1-7 (Christians and the powers that be); *c* is 13:8-10 (love of neighbor as the fulfilling of the law in human relationships); *b* is 13:11-14 (Christ as the pattern of Christian living); *a* is 14:1-15:6 (the basis for social intercourse other than the law), yet it is doubtful whether 13:1-7 is the central thought here.

³⁶Although it seems unwarranted by the term ἀδελφοί, some commentators translate it as "brothers and sisters." See Moo, *Romans*, 748; Schreiner, *Romans*, 642.

³⁷Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary: Romans*, 1:81-82.

³⁸Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:112-13.

while Dunn equates this with the ministry in 12:8 and warns against seeing “extra leverage” being exercised by the language.³⁹ More correctly is probably the view of Moo, who senses the nuance of the verb and decides that “the semantic range lies somewhere between ‘request’ and ‘command’,” as an exhortation that comes with the authority of a mediator of God’s truth, rather than the authority of a commander.⁴⁰

Before going into the content of the exhortation, however, Paul deems it necessary to mention that the basis for his exhortation is God’s mercy (τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ),⁴¹ of which he is the agent.⁴² The mercy in view is explicitly expressed in God’s mercy in relation to Jews and Gentiles Paul expounded on in chapters 9-11, but also implicitly seen from the first eight chapters “in the saving work of Jesus Christ, the gift of his Spirit, his perseverance with faithless Israel, and his gracious offer of salvation to the Gentiles.”⁴³ Yet this mercy is not past mercy only, as Moo points out. Rather, its power continues to be manifested in and through us to produce the obedience that the gospel demands. What Paul exhorts from believers is to respond appropriately and gratefully to God’s mercy.⁴⁴ Murray calls this “the heart of the exhortation.”⁴⁵

The appropriate response to God’s mercy that Paul calls for is for believers “to offer their bodies as a sacrifice” (παραστήσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν). For Cranfield, this is a technical term for offering sacrifice to God in extra-biblical Greek, and as the sacrifice is offered, it is no longer

³⁹Dunn, *Romans*, 708.

⁴⁰Moo, *Romans*, 748-749. For similar view, Schreiner, *Romans*, 642, writes, “The Pauline exhortations do not merely contain good advice or his preferences. They represent the authoritative will of God and are enjoined upon churches in a solemn manner.” Cranfield, *Romans*, 2: 597, writes, “It denotes the authoritative summons to obedience issued in the name of the gospel.”

⁴¹For an explanation of the singular or plural rendering, see “Translation” above. God’s mercy may be manifested in diverse ways or deeds, where the plural noun is appropriate, but when it refers to the attribute of God, the singular may serve as well. After all, it is the same mercy from the same sovereign God (9:18).

⁴²Moo, *Romans*, 749.

⁴³Peterson, “Worship and Ethics,” 279-80.

⁴⁴Moo, *Romans*, 749-50.

⁴⁵Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2: 113.

one's own, but wholly God's property.⁴⁶ Godet suggests that, based on the use of aorist infinitive for the verb translated "offering," the offering is performed once-for-all.⁴⁷ This conclusion is unwarranted, for the aorist tense itself does not inherently denote once-for-all action, which has to be supplied by other contextual factors.⁴⁸ What believers are asked to offer is "their bodies." Murray concedes that there is no intent here to restrict "the body" to physical body, yet he argues that neither is there any warrant to take "the body" as synonymous to the whole person. In the end, Murray seems to be more concerned with the physical body,⁴⁹ whereas Calvin writes, "By *bodies*, he means not only our bones and skin, but the whole mass of which we are composed; and he adopted this word, that he might more fully designate all that we are."⁵⁰ However, in the light of the subsequent context (12:3-15:13), where Paul's exhortations have to do with believers' conduct and attitude in living within the Christian community and the world, other views are more preferable. Dunn, among others, writes, "σωμα denotes not just the person, but the person in his corporeality, in his concrete relationships within this world; it is because he is body that man can experience the world and relate to others."⁵¹ "The body" then seems to be more than just the physical body,

⁴⁶Cranfield, *Romans*, 2: 598-99.

⁴⁷Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 427.

⁴⁸Schreiner, *Romans*, 643. Also, Moo, *Romans*, 750, who writes, "Paul simply commands us to make this offering, saying nothing about how often it needs to be done." Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:600, who writes that the self-surrender of the Christian has to be continually repeated.⁴⁹Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:110-111. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, (n.p., n.d.), 599 n.372 (concur by saying that "understanding 'body' as an anthropological term for the whole person seems misguided," but he grants that "body" is equal to "oneself" in this passage.

⁵⁰Calvin, *Romans*, 452 (emphasis original) (n.p., n.d.).

⁵¹Dunn, *Romans*, 709. Also, Wright, "The Letter to the Romans", 704, views the body as referring to the complete person seen from the point of view in which the human being lives as a physical object within space and time. Moo, *Romans*, 750-51, writes, "Paul probably intends to refer to the entire person, with special emphasis on that person's interaction with the world." Schreiner, *Romans*, 644, writes, "Genuine commitment to God embraces every area of life, and includes the body in all of its particularity and concreteness." Peterson, "Worship and Ethics," 281, quotes R. Corriveau, *The Liturgy of Life: A Study of the Ethical Thought of St. Paul in His Letters to the Early Christian Communities*, *Studia 25*

or even the whole person, but the believer and his life in Christ. This language of “offering the body” harks back to 6:13, 16, and 19 (“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?” 6:16, NIV). What Paul implied earlier in the preceding context, he now nuances with an explicit sacrificial language, for to offer something to God is to be involved in cultic practice. Murray suggests that “Romans 6:13 is the index to Paul’s meaning here.”³² In the light of 6:13, 16, and 19, therefore, to offer the body as a sacrifice probably means for Paul to obey as slaves in one’s whole existence, because once offered, ownership of a sacrifice passes over to God, like a slave who does not own himself any longer.

Paul further specifies the kind of sacrifice believers are to offer, it is to be living, holy, and pleasing to God (ζώσαν, ἁγίαν, εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ). Fee views the metaphor of a “living sacrifice” as a kind of “metaphorical oxymoron,” since sacrifice implies the death of the sacrificed victim.³³ But this is most likely what Paul tries to convey in chapter 6, that having been baptized into Christ’s death and died to sin, and that just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too are resurrected to live a new life,³⁴ now as those who have been brought from death to life, we offer ourselves to God. Schreiner argues that “living” portrays the spiritual state of believers, as only those who are alive in Christ are called to offer their lives as sacrifice.³⁵ Murray writes, “It is a body alive from the dead that the

(Desclée de Brouwer/Les Éditions Bellarmin, Bruxelles-Paris/Montréal, 1970), 171: “(Under the New Covenant) we no longer have material offerings distinct from the giver but rather the personal offering of the body, of earthly life, inseparable from the existence of the one who offers.”

³²Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:111; Cf. Dunn, *Romans*, 708-9 and Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 598 n.370. Contra Moo, *Romans*, 751, who sees the sacrificial context in chapter 12 but not in chapter 6, and Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:598, who sees a different sense for *παροστίσαι* here than in chapter 6, due to the absence of the dative (τῷ θεῷ).

³³Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 600.

³⁴Sanctification follows justification. Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:600; Dunn, *Romans*, 710.

³⁵Schreiner, *Romans*, 644.

believer is to present, alive from the dead because the body of sin has been destroyed."⁵⁶ Besides living, the sacrifice to be offered has to be holy, for nothing less than holy is pleasing to God,

The next phrase that Paul uses has not been easy to translate, much less to interpret. Opinions vary as to how λογικῆν, a term used nowhere else by Paul and elsewhere only once in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:2), should be rendered, and what it means. For Käsemann, λογικῆν λατρείαν which he translates as "spiritual worship," is a key phrase for Paul because in Paul's thought "only the man endowed with *pneuma* is in a position to offer spiritual worship."⁵⁷ Peterson takes issue with this translation and warns against the inwardness of Christian worship, not taking enough account of the fact that we are to offer our bodies to God's service. On the other hand, the translation "rational worship" may suggest only "a contrast between the offering of rational beings and the sacrifice of irrational animals." For the focus is not merely on rationality, rather Paul calls for the obedience of faith from those whose minds are being transformed and renewed. So he suggests, along with Cranfield, "understanding worship," meaning "the worship which is consonant with the truth of the gospel."⁵⁸ Fee suggests that this strange word makes a lot of sense as a positive response to the dreadful picture of chapter 1. Paul starts the whole argument in 1:18-32 depicting people who are created in God's image worship and serve (ἐλάτρευσαν) the creature rather than the Creator, so that God gives them over to a depraved mind (1:28), but through Christ and his Spirit, God shows his mercies. Hence their response should be offering to God their

⁵⁶Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:111; Moo, *Romans*, 751, disagrees with the allusion to Romans 6, because "living" does not modify "body," but rather "sacrifice," "one that does not die as it is offered but goes on living and therefore continues in its efficacy until the person who is offered dies."

⁵⁷Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. W. J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 190, quoted by Peterson, "Worship and Ethics," 272 (emphasis original).

⁵⁸Peterson, "Worship and Ethics," 275. Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:605, writes, "While λογικῆν here certainly excludes any external ritual worship in which the heart and mind and will of the worshipper are not involved, it also excludes equally definitely any worship which consists only of interior motions and feeling, however exalted, unaccompanied by outward obedience."

worship (λογικὴν λατρείαν), with a renewed mind. Hence he renders the phrase “the service that a rational being created in God’s image, with a mind renewed by the Spirit, can offer.”⁵⁹ Peterson agrees with Fee’s “linguistic ties” and calls Romans 12:1-2 “a reversal of the downward spiral” depicted in Romans 1.⁶⁰ In 12:2, Paul follows up on what he lays out in 12:1, to which 12:2 is joined by the conjunction translated as “and” (καί). In agreement with Moo, we see the relationship between the two verses as subordinate, but contrary to Moo, probably verse 1 is subordinate to verse 2, saying, “After offering your bodies as living sacrifices, do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,” yet the two are closely bound up together.⁶¹ The first part of 12:2, namely, “do not conform to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοῦς) shows two contrasting parallels (“do not conform” vs “be transformed”; “this age” vs “the renewal of mind”). While older scholarship and some recent ones tend to make a distinction between the two verbs, taking the former as outward superficial conformity and the latter as inner transformation, most recent commentators have argued convincingly that the two verbs that are translated “conform” and “transform” (συσχηματίζεσθε and μεταμορφοῦσθε) are practically synonymous in Koine Greek.⁶² Hence we can say, with Peterson, that the first verb warns against the transformation according to the pattern of this age, while the second verb suggests the transforming work of God on believers

⁵⁹Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 601.

⁶⁰Peterson, “Worship and Ethics,” 284.

⁶¹Moo, *Romans*, 754. Moo thinks v.2 is subordinate to v.1, giving the means to carry out the exhortation of v.1, reading: “We can present our bodies to the Lord as genuinely holy and acceptable sacrifices only if we ‘do not conform to this world’ but ‘are transformed by the renewing of the mind’.” Peterson, “Worship and Ethics,” 282, writes, “If their sacrifice is to please God in the ongoing pressures and demands of everyday life, believers must continually be transformed by the renewal of their mind.”⁶²Peterson, “Worship and Ethics,” 282. Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:605-8, thinks the translation “conform” and “transform” adequately represents Paul’s meaning. Moo, *Romans*, 755-56, especially n.67, argues that the shift in root (schm-root to morf-root) reflects no difference in meaning. Schreiner, *Romans*, 646-47.

through his Spirit, both are in present imperative signaling that the ongoing human responsibility is involved in the transformation.⁶³ Then by bringing up the notion of “this age,” Paul is alluding to something familiar to his Jewish audience and pointing to the eschatological dimension of his teaching.⁶⁴ “This age” is evil and sin-dominated in which all people naturally belong after Adam’s fall. Hence the exhortation not to conform to their default mode; Pauline ethic is negative because it takes account of the presence of sin.⁶⁵ But “this age” is going to be replaced by “the age to come,” which is blessed and to which the renewed mind belongs. “The age to come” is ushered in by Christ’s death and resurrection. Those who are united with Christ in his death and resurrection have thus been transferred from “this age” into “the age to come.” Nevertheless, as we continue to live in the body, before Christ comes to release us from this body (7:22-25) and “this age,” we live in the period of overlap between “this age” and “the age to come.” For that reason, we, who live in the newness of life by the regeneration of the Spirit, need to continue renewing our minds in order not to conform to “this age.”⁶⁶ The purpose of this “non-conformation” and “transformation,” Paul continues, is in order that “you may approve what the will of God is, that which is good and pleasing and perfect” (εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον.), because apart from renewal of the mind, the human mind does not understand the will of God and lives in rebellion against God. As Moo writes, “to approve the will of God is to understand and agree with what God wants of us with a view to putting it into practice.”⁶⁷ This is diametrically opposite to the situation depicted in Romans 1:28 (“They did not think it

⁶³Peterson, “Worship and Ethics,” 282.

⁶⁴Ibid., 282-83, citing Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, 329.

⁶⁵Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:113; Moo, *Romans*, 754; Schreiner, *Romans*, 647.

⁶⁶Schreiner, *Romans*, 647, writes, “Transformation by the renewal of the mind, then, involves the penetration of the coming age into the present evil age... Believers resist the pressures to conform to the present evil age by the renewal of their minds.”

⁶⁷Moo, *Romans*, 757.

worthwhile [οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν] to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind [ἀδόκιμον νοῦν], to do what ought not to be done." NIV), where God has delivered them into a condition in which their mind is "so debilitated and corrupted as to be a quite untrustworthy guide in moral decisions,"⁶⁸ and 2:18, where the Jews claim that they know God's will and approve of what is superior (δοκιμάζεις τὰ διαφέροντα) because they are instructed by the law,⁶⁹ while in actuality, they break the very law they teach. Now with a renewed mind, they are enabled to approve the will of God, the good, pleasing, and perfect will.⁷⁰ For Cranfield, the good is that which is morally good, the pleasing is that which is good determined by God's will, and the perfect is that which God claims wholly for himself and for our neighbors (Matthew 22:37, 39).⁷¹

To summarize 12:1-2, by using "therefore," Paul looks back to what he wrote in chapters 1-11, especially about God's mercy in dealing with man, and exhorts his readers to respond to this mercy by offering the totality of their lives as a sacrifice, in the fashion of slaves, who have died and been resurrected, therefore living, and being holy in order to be pleasing to God. This is the worship of a true believer. Following that, they ought to resist staying in the default mode of their sinful nature by having their mind renewed in the new life in order that they may now understand and obey God's will. Romans 12:3-8

Paul begins this section with "for" (γάρ) to introduce the reason for his exhortation above, to unfold the richness of 12:1-2 as it does into

⁶⁸Cranfield, *Romans*, 1: 128.

⁶⁹Peterson, "Worship and Ethics," 283-84.

⁷⁰Most commentators take the three adjectives as substantival in apposition to the will of God, e.g.: Peterson, "Worship and Ethics," 284; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2: 115; Schreiner, *Romans*, 648. Dunn, *Romans*, 715 (only εὐάγατον is taken as substantival)

⁷¹Cranfield, *Romans*, 2: 610-11.

⁷²Ridgway, "By the Mercies of God," (n.p., n.d.) 178, writes, "What Paul says in 12:3-21 is the logical development and concrete application of his thought in 12:1-2: authentic worship and renewal of minds are to find responsible expression in actual Christian living." Calvin, *Romans*, 455, however, thinks the "for" is redundant.

⁷³Moo, *Romans*, 760. The parallels with Romans 1:5, 15:15-16, and probably

concrete application.⁷² Here Paul is speaking in full consciousness of his role as the apostle of the Gentiles,⁷³ with no less authority than “I exhort” previously in verse 1, “by the grace given me I say to every one among you” (Λέγω γὰρ διὰ τῆς χάριτος τῆς δοθείσης μοι παντὶ τῷ ὄντι ἐν ὑμῖν). Here, “to every one among you” is emphasized to anticipate verses 3b-6.⁷⁴ Schreiner suggests that apart from conveying apostolic authority, “grace” also demonstrates Paul’s humility despite his own gifts of grace.⁷⁵ What Paul says to every one among them is an imperative: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but think so as to think soberly (μὴ ὑπερφρονεῖν παρ’ ὃ δεῖ φρονεῖν ἀλλὰ φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν). The word play in Greek (ὑπερφρονεῖν - φρονεῖν - φρονεῖν - σωφρονεῖν) can hardly be missed, though it may not be reflected adequately in English. However, the “imbalanced-sandwich structure” is useful to portray the sense it conveys. Moo points out that *fronei'n* which means “think” does not refer to thinking as an intellectual process, but the direction of one’s thinking when one views himself, as the product of a “renewed mind” (12:2).⁷⁶ Hence standing in the position of φρονεῖν, one is to turn to the direction of σωφρονεῖν instead of ὑπερφρονεῖν, that is, to think soberly instead of to think beyond what one is. Yet, equally implied in this sober thinking here is the exclusion of false humility, as Murray writes, “We sin by esteeming ourselves beyond what we are. But if we underestimate, then we are refusing to acknowledge God’s grace and fail to exercise that which God has dispensed for our own sanctification and that of others.” In order to adopt this sound estimation of oneself, “God has apportioned to each a quantity of faith” (ἐκάστω ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἐμέρισεν μέτρον πίστεως). This faith referred to here is not the faith which is believed or the truth of the gospel, but the faith

with 11:13 lead to the conclusion that “grace” here refers to Paul’s apostolic calling. Dunn, *Romans*, 720, thinks Paul’s “grace” is no different in kind from the “grace” given to them.

⁷²Dunn, *Romans*, 720, suggests Paul sees the possibility of factional tension. But in view of vv. 3-6, it is more likely that Paul is addressing every individual believer as a member of the body despite their differences, which God in his grace has caused to exist. Cf. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:116-17.

⁷³Schreiner, *Romans*, 651. Cf. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:117.

⁷⁴Moo, *Romans*, 760.

exercised by the believer which is variously distributed among the members of the Christian community. Murray writes, "This nomenclature is used to emphasize the cardinal place which faith occupies not only in our becoming members of this community but also in the specific functions performed as members of it." He later points out that the difference in terms of measure between Christ and the members of his body. On the one hand for the members, "there is the corresponding faith by which and within the limits of which the gift is to be exercised," on the other hand for Christ, "there is no *measure* for his endowments," because all the fullness dwell in him.⁷⁷ Wright suggests that this anticipates the "strong in faith" and the "weak in faith" in chapters 14-15.⁷⁸ But even before we go as far as chapter 14, Paul has already pointed out in the next verse: "For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function. So also we, who are many, are one body⁷⁹ in Christ, and individually members of one another and we have different gifts according to the grace given to us (καθάπερ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι πολλὰ μέλη ἔχομεν, τὰ δὲ μέλη πάντα οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει πρᾶξιν, οὕτως οἱ πολλοὶ ἐν σώμα ἴσμεν ἐν Χριστῷ, τὸ δὲ καθ' εἰς ἀλλήλων μέλη. ἔχοντες δὲ χαρίσματα κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖ

⁷⁷Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:120-21. Similar position is taken by Schreiner, *Romans*, 652-53, Dunn, *Romans*, 721-22, and Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 609-10. The difficulty Moo and others have with this view is that they see this faith as saving faith, and thus cannot see Paul considering this faith as given by God in differing measures.

⁷⁸Wright, "The Letter to the Romans", 709. He also suggests that "Throughout the letter so far, 'faith' is the same for everybody (3:27-30)" The measure then, as some renders μέτρον, "is a measuring-rod which is the same for all, called 'faith.' It is up to each Christian to see where they come against that standard." Moo, *Romans*, 761, takes similar position, saying that "our faith is the measure" (emphasis original). Like Wright, Moo seems to equate basic Christian faith (saving faith) with common grace and fails to account for the distributive implication of ἐμέρισεν. He writes, "If faith is, then, *basic Christian faith* as given equally by God to all, then the 'measure of faith' could refer to this shared faith as the standard by which Christians are to regard themselves... 'Measure of faith,' then, should be compared in this paragraph not to the many different 'gifts' that God distributes to believers, but to the one *common grace* from which they stem" (emphasis added). See also the extended argument of Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:613-16.

σαν ἑμῶν διάφορα). Paul has just told the Romans to have a proper estimation of themselves, because God has given each and everyone among them different gifts. Now he follows up by giving the reason ("for") or elaboration for his exhortation using the analogy of a body. It is interesting to note that in the first statement of the analogy, Paul lays out: one body – many members – different functions; but in the second statement, he puts forth: we the many – one body in Christ – members of one another. What we find as the last element of the second statement, namely "members of one another" is not what we expect, namely, "different functions/gifts," which comes next in verse 6a. That is why verse 6a is considered together with verses 4-5.³⁹ Here, as is obvious to many commentators, Paul uses the imagery of the body to reflect the diversity and unity of the Christian community, and each believer is a member of the body that constitutes the diversity. Paul's starting point is the unity of the body and then based on common knowledge about the body, he points to the need to recognize the diversity within the body.⁴⁰ This diversity comes in the form of different functionalities/gifts (χαρίσματα) among the members according to the grace (χάρις) God has given to each. In the light of verses 1-3, they have received the mercies of God to become a part of this community, now by offering themselves to God in totality and continuously renewing their minds, they can soberly estimate their standing among the diversity of functions possessed by different members of the community, some are "legs" while some are "eyes," because they are "individually members of one another." This last phrase may point either to the interdependence among the community members, or to the obligation of one member to serve another. However, they are individually members of one another not in a vacuum, but only because they are in

³⁹Dunn, *Romans*, 725, points out that "It is almost universally assumed that v 6 begins a new sentence," but, for example in RSV, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them," the last four underlined words has to be added. Dunn writes, "The sentence reads more naturally as a continuation of the body imagery of vv 4-5 with the meaning of ἀλλήλων μέλη spelled out in terms of different charisms." Cf. Murray, *Romans*, 2:121.

⁴⁰Moo, *Romans*, 762-63. Dunn, *Romans*, 725, writes, "The body is *one* not despite its diversity, but is *one body* only by virtue of its diversity; without that

Christ, just as each member is a recipient of the grace only in Christ. For that reason alone, proper self-estimation is called for: neither self-aggrandizement so as to be proud nor self-doubting so as to deprive other members of one's gift. One can certainly make the connection between "the body" (σῶμα) in v.1 and v.5, because true worship in the physical body is manifested in the daily relationship in the body of Christ.⁸¹ Paul then goes on to sample a list of different gifts within the church:⁸² if (one has the gift of) prophecy, (let him use it) according to the proportion of faith; If (one has the gift of) service, (let him use it) in service; if (one has the gift of) one who teaches, (let him use it) in teaching; If (one has the gift of) one who exhorts, (let him use it) in exhortation; (if one has the gift of) one who shares, (let him use it) in generosity; (if one has the gift of) one who leads, (let him use it) with diligence; (if one has the gift of) one who shows mercy, (let him use it) with cheerfulness (εἴτε προφητείαν κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως, εἴτε διακονίαν ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ, εἴτε ὁ διδάσκων ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ, εἴτε ὁ παρακαλῶν ἐν τῇ παρακλήσει· ὁ μεταδιδούς ἐν ἀπλότητι, ὁ προϊστάμενος ἐν σπουδῇ, ὁ ἐλεῶν ἐν ἰλαρότητι). Moo comments that the syntactical progression of verses 6-8 is not clear. Taken as indicative, it seems that the qualifications attached to each gifts do not account for the hortatory sense, which Paul uses to exhort each prophecy. The exercise of this gift of prophecy is to be done according to believer to exercise in accordance with his quantity of faith. Hence ellipses are assumed in each mention of the gifts.⁸³

The first gift mentioned is that of prophecy. For Calvin, this prophecy

diversity the body would be a monstrosity" (emphasis original).

⁸¹Dunn, *Romans*, 726, comments, "The fact that vv 3-8 follow vv 1-2 should not be forgotten: there is obviously a conceptual but also a theological link between the σῶμα of v 1 and the σῶμα of v 5; membership of the body of Christ is not to be separated from the daily service involved in human relationship." It seems to me that both "membership" and "daily service" are in v.5, hence my modification.

⁸²That the list of gifts here is not exhaustive is pointed out, among others, by Schreiner, *Romans*, 655; Wright, "The Letter to the Romans", 710; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:121.

⁸³Moo, *Romans*, 763-64. Cf. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:121 and Calvin, *Romans*, 460.

is none other than "the right understanding of the Scripture, and the peculiar faculty of explaining it" perpetually in the church.⁸⁴ In other words, it is preaching or teaching the Word. Schreiner, however, disagrees and suggests based on 1 Corinthians 14:29-33 that it is spontaneous revelation that is shared with the congregation, giving practical guidance in particular circumstances, and then being judged by the congregation or other prophets as to its validity (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).⁸⁵ More sound exegetically is Gaffin's argument that this gift is given to some on the basis of differential distribution and it is revelatory and inspired in character. That it is judged does not imply that it lacks the authority of God's Word, but to avoid false prophecy, the exercise of this gift of prophecy is to be done according to the proportion of faith. Here Gaffin points out that "faith" is correlative with "grace" and "gift" (v.6a) that explains how "faith" is both the believer's faith and the measure that differs from believer to believer. Just as in 12:3-4, the "measure of faith" accounts for the different functions of the members,

⁸⁴Calvin, *Romans*, 460.

⁸⁵Schreiner, *Romans*, 656. Also, Cranfield, *International Critical Commentary: Romans*, 2:620; Dunn, *Romans*, 727; Moo, *Romans*, 765, explicitly adds that "the truth revealed by the prophet did not come with the authority of the truth taught by the apostles"; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:122, derives the support for the importance of prophecy from 3 passages: Joel 2:28/Acts 2:16-17, Ephesians 4:11, 2:20. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 169-71, 890-92, however, argues that Paul never raises the question of "authority" in prophecy. Part of the reason why prophecies must be discerned is because OT prophecies were. The NT prophets are in the succession of OT prophets, yet are different due to their eschatological (between the times, 1 Cor. 13:8-13) existence. The fact that the prophecies must be discerned shows that no prophetic word is to be raised to the level of "inspired text," and that prophecy is a strictly community affair, for the sake of community's corporate life. Fee suggests significant studies for understanding prophecy in Paul: D. Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979); Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians*. (Washington: University Press of America, 1982); David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983); and articles by H. Krämer, R. Rentdorff, R. Meyer, G. Friedrich, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Trans. Gerhard Kittel and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley. 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006). Since this topic of prophecy is not our main concern in this paper, we will suffice with these references here.

here in 12:6 the “proportion of faith” is grace manifested in different gifts of believers. In the light of this correlation, Gaffin also argues for the appending of the phrase “according to the proportion of faith” to each enumeration of gifts so as to bring out the consideration that each gift is a grace that has to be exercised faithfully and appropriately. Applying this understanding of the phrase “according to the proportion of faith” to each gift will help to make plain the meaning of the other six gifts: If (one’s gift is) service, (let him use it) in serving according to the proportion of his faith... If (one’s gift is as) one who shows mercy, (let him use it in showing mercy) with cheerfulness according to the proportion of his faith.⁸⁶ Paul’s purpose here, therefore, is not to teach on how to exercise each different gift *per se*, as shown by the fact that the list is not exhaustive and, as Dunn puts it, “The degree of work overlap between the different charisms... confirms that Paul did not have in view a set of clearly defined ministries.”⁸⁷ Rather, his primary consideration here is for those who have the gifts to be devoted to the excellence of the particular gift that they have

⁸⁶Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1979), 58-72, especially 62-65. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 607-11 and Schreiner, *Romans*, 655-56, also argues in the same direction. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:122-23, however, accents the content of prophecy. He writes, “The prophet when he speaks God’s word is not to go beyond that which God has given him to speak... he is not to withhold the truth he is commissioned to disclose.” Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:620-21, stresses the *fides qua creditur* nature of faith, followed by Moo, *Romans*, 765. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans”, 711, argues that “Paul intends to refer to the proportional relationship between the Christian faith as a whole and what individual prophets say, rather than to the proportional relationship between the gift of prophecy and the amount of faith an individual prophet may have.” Dunn, *Romans*, 727-28, says this understanding makes Paul leave his teaching open to the abuse of false prophecy, without the appropriate check of a proper sense of dependence on God to give the words. Cf. C. Samuel Storm representing Third Wave View in Wayne Grudem, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996) 207-12. With regards to “in proportion to his faith,” he writes, “The prophet is to speak in proportion to the confidence and assurance he or she has that what is spoken is truly from God.”

⁸⁷Dunn, *Romans*, 735.

been given (according to the proportion of their faith) and to appreciate other gifts in their community, instead of trying to imitate those who have other gifts²⁸ or downplaying the other "less important" gifts, although he does point out the attitudes needed to carry out those gifts (generously, diligently, cheerfully).

We can now summarize 12:3-8 as following: Paul is exhorting believers not to think more highly of themselves, but according to the kind of grace God has given to each, because we are all one body in Christ. Just as each body has many parts with different functions, there are many different gifts among us according to the grace given to us, and we are mutually dependent one on another. For example, if one member has the gift of prophesying, let him not covet the gift of leadership, nor disparage the gift of showing mercy, but let him prophesy faithfully and appropriately for the benefits of other members. In connection with 12:1-2, Paul's exhortation in 12:3-8 makes sense as God's will for his people only if believers have presented the sacrifice of their whole existence as an act of true worship, with their minds continuously renewed by the Spirit.

Theological Motifs in Romans 12:1-8

Having done the exegesis of the passage, it may be profitable to accent three salient points in the passage:

1. Worship (λατρεία)

In the LXX, *latreiva* is used fully in parallel to that of *latreuein*, meaning to serve or worship cultically, especially by sacrifice. The first use of *latreuein* in the New Testament to indicate the whole conduct of the righteous towards God is found in Luke 1:74. When Paul uses this word in Romans 1:9-10, there is a measure of oscillation both outwardly in his missionary work and inwardly in his prayer for the progress of his missionary. Then in Phil. 3:3, Christian worship is contrasted with that of the Judaizers, whose confidence is in the flesh, where as Christians worship by the Spirit of God. At this stage, the use of *latreuein* has been broadened to a worship of God in the whole life. Hence in Romans 12:1 the metaphorical use of the

²⁸Schreiner, *Romans*, 657.

noun refers both to the inner lives and the outward physical conduct. Here⁸⁹ the biblical history of the cultic term *latreiva* reaches its climax in this interiorisation, which is also the most comprehensive exteriorization.⁹⁰ If Paul says here in Romans 12:1, offer your bodies as living sacrifices – this is your true worship, we see the reason in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, for there he says, “You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” True worship is then giving God what belongs to him. Our bodies do not belong to us in the first place; it was bought with the blood of Christ as the ultimate sacrifice. If it is not offered to God in union with Christ for renewal by the Spirit, it will be conformed to this age. As we see in Romans 1:25 the created things were worshipped and served instead of the Creator, so here in Romans 12:1 by means of the offering of the body to God the true worship has commenced in the believer who has died and resurrected with Christ to the newness of life in the Spirit. Paul also accents this point in 15:15-16, that the grace God gives him has the purpose of making the Gentiles an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

2. Body (σῶμα) of Christ.

The use of σῶμα to portray the community of believers in the New Testament is unique to Paul. Fung writes, “There seems to be little doubt that of all the pictures of the Church in the New Testament that of the Body of Christ represents Paul’s mature reflections on the subject.”⁹⁰ Besides Romans 12:4-5, Paul uses the body metaphor in a more developed form in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. Just as in Romans 12, so also in 1 Corinthians 12, after he elaborates on the nature of the body, Paul goes on to talk about various gifts in the church, with an understood transition from the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27) to the church (1 Cor. 12:28). What is noteworthy here is that although the list of gifts here in 1 Corinthians 12:28 is comparable to that in Romans 12:6-8, they are not exactly similar. So, as was pointed out above, both lists can not be exhaustive, and Paul’s purpose in listing them is

⁸⁹H. Strathman, “λατρεῖω, λατρεία” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 58-65.

none other than to accent the diversity of gifts in the body of Christ. If in Romans 12 this diversity is simply stated as difference in function among many members in the body who belong to one another, in 1 Corinthians 12 Paul adds a few more essential truths about the body. First among others, as Ridderbos argues is, the fact that the church is not the body from its own existence, but because the church is the body of Christ, it has to operate as a body. Then because of the common unity in Christ, the members form a new unity with each other ("Now you are the body of Christ." 1 Cor. 12:27, NIV).⁹¹ But this unity in Christ is also unity in the Spirit, so secondly, to be a part of the body; one is baptized into this body, an already existing one, by the Spirit which is the gift believers share due to their incorporation into the body. Hence fellowship with the body entails fellowship with the Spirit ("We were all given the one Spirit to drink," 1 Cor. 12:13, NIV).⁹² Finally, Ridderbos points out that designating the church as the body of Christ is not mainly to point out its unity and diversity, but rather its unity in and with Christ in the redemptive-historical sense of including the many in the one. This inclusion of the believers into the body of Christ is symbolized by baptism and the Lord's Supper.⁹³

3. Gifts (χαρίσματα)

Since this word is not found in the LXX or in Greek writers before the Christian era,⁹⁴ and is used almost exclusively in the Pauline corpus,⁹⁵ Käsemann suggests that, "We can establish with the maximum degree of historical certainty that it was Paul who was the first to use it [*charisma*] in this technical sense and who indeed introduced it into the vocabulary of

⁹⁰Ronald Yam-Kwan Fung, *Ministry, Community, and Spiritual Gifts* (Master of Theology Thesis; Fuller Theological Seminary, 1971), 13.

⁹¹Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 370-71.

⁹²Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology*, 372-73.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 375-76.

⁹⁴Fung, *Ministry, Community, and Spiritual Gifts*, 40 citing BDAG, 1081.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

theology.⁹⁶ Ridderbos defines *charisma* as “what Christ by his Spirit grants to the church in diversity and freedom.”⁹⁷ Fung provides important and helpful observations from 1 Corinthians 12-14, Romans 12:3-8, and Ephesians 4:7-16 in the following facts and principles:⁹⁸ (1) the origin of the *charismata* is in the work of the triune God (1 Cor. 12:4-6);⁹⁹ (2) the distribution of the *charismata* is according to the will of the triune God (1 Cor. 12:11, 28; Eph. 4:7), in rich diversity, variously to different believers, some may have more than one, but none is left out; (3) the goal of the *charismata* is for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7), namely, the edification of the whole community; (4) the manner in exercising the *charismata* is in love (1 Cor. 12:31, 13:1-3, 14:1), in service,¹⁰⁰ and in obedience to the lordship of Christ (1 Cor. 12:2-3).¹⁰¹ Fung also sees the “perfect harmony” between Paul’s conception of the spiritual gifts and his conception of the Church, because the former is one aspect of the latter. Hence, as pointed out above, Paul’s passages on *charismata* follows the passages where the Church is conceived as the body of Christ.¹⁰²

⁹⁶E. Käsemann, “Ministry and Community in the New Testament,” *Essays on New Testament Themes*, 64, quoted in Ridderbos, *Paul*, 441 n.38.

⁹⁷Ridderbos, *Paul*, 441. Fung, *Ministry, Community, and Spiritual Gifts*, 43, provides the definition, “A special endowment or equipment bestowed on the believer by the Holy Spirit for Christian service.”

⁹⁸Fung, *Ministry, Community, and Spiritual Gifts*, 79-87.

⁹⁹See also Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 48-49 on “The Trinitarian Character of the Gifts.”

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 85. Fung quotes Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, 67, “No spiritual endowment has value, rights and privileges on its own account. It is validated only by the service it renders.” He also cites Han Küng, *The Church*, trans. Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 394, that diakonia is rooted in charisma, and charisma leads to diakonia. See also Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, 49 on “The Ministerial Character of Gifts.”

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 86. Fung cites Käsemann, that the doctrine of the *charismata*, like any other doctrine, is not to be separated from the doctrine of Christ, and quotes, “The Giver is not to be separated from his gift but is really present in it.”

¹⁰²Fung, *Ministry, Community, and Spiritual Gifts*, 89.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to study Romans 12:1-8 with a view towards proving the thesis that in this passage, Paul's main purpose is not teach about spiritual gifts *per se*. In other words, the accent is not on verses 6-8, which is really an elaboration of verses 4-5. In turn, verses 4-5 are an analogy provided by Paul to explain his exhortation in v. 3 on thinking soberly according to the measure of faith. Verse 3, or verses 3-8 for that matter, is then connected to verses 1-2 as a reason for the exhortation in the latter.

In this passage, then, we find Paul's main purpose as teaching believers to think soberly according to the measure of faith God has given to each of them. This comes as a result of his previous exhortation to offer their bodies to God as sacrifices and to renew their mind by transformation in order to approve God's will. Paul deems it necessary to give this exhortation because he realizes that as believers, his readers are now incorporated into the body of Christ, which constitutes diversity of gifts. Therefore, in order to avoid potential conflicts, he exhorts them to sober thinking in positioning themselves.