TOTAL COMMITMENT TO GOD, HUMBLE COMMITMENT TO THE CHURCH
Romans 12:1-8

Translation

12:1 In light of the truths of the gospel I have presented to you in this letter, I urge each of you, brothers and sisters, because of God’s mercies towards us, to give your entire self to God -- this is your true sacrifice and reasonable act of worship! 2 If you truly desire to give your entire self to God, you must allow the Spirit to renew your mind, to think on the things God wants you to think, and not on the things of this world, which is passing away. Then you’ll know what God’s good and perfect will is! 3 But I have a warning: with all of my apostolic authority, I say to each one of you not to think more highly of yourself than you must, but instead consider yourself with sober judgment, in light of the amount of faith that God has given to you. 4 Just as a human body is made up of many different parts, 5 so we who are many are one body in Christ, and therefore we need and belong to one another, 6 having different gifts through which grace works itself out in concrete actions that benefit the community. These gifts include prophecy, service, teaching, encouragement, giving, leadership, and showing mercy.

Exegetical Idea and Outline

The standard for the Christian life is total commitment to God, resulting in an understanding of God’s will and evidenced in humble commitment to the one church in all its diversity.

I. The standard by which believers are to truly worship God is total dedication to Him, which results in mental and moral transformation so God’s will may be discerned (12:1-2).

A. The standard for true worship is to present the entirety of one’s life to God (12:1).

B. The result of presenting one’s life to God is to be inwardly transformed through the renewing of the mind (12:2a).

C. The purpose of this transformation is to be able to discern God’s will (12:2b).

II. The evidence that believers are totally dedicated to God is their humble commitment to the one church in all the diversity of its members and their gifts (12:3-8).

A. The result of a renewed life is humility, which is the evidence of transformation as exhibited in interpersonal relationships in the church (12:3).

B. The reason a believer should be humble is because of the unity and diversity of the church (12:4-5).

C. The application of the diversity of the one church to individual believers is the diversity of spiritual gifts (12:6-8).
Introduction

Starting with 12:1, Paul transitions from theological discourse to moral exhortation, but he does so in a carefully crafted way which “sets forth the premises of his ethic in a manner that sustains the missional imperative as a whole” (Jewett, 724). Paul’s exhortations in this pericope - and in the rest of the epistle - are not divorced from but are in fact necessarily linked to all of what he has written to the Romans thus far. Throughout the epistle, Paul has expounded the glory of the gospel, which necessarily involves deliverance from the power of sin (cf. 6:1-4). The only conceivable lifestyle for the one who believes Paul’s gospel in Rom 1-11 is the life described in Rom 12-15. So, as Moo writes, while it is true that Paul is transitioning from “indicative” to “imperative,” and from “what God has given to us” to “what we are to give to God,” we must not lose sight of the unity of the epistle, for “the ‘imperative’ of a transformed life is therefore not an optional ‘second step’ after we embrace the gospel: it is rooted in our initial response to the gospel itself” (Moo, 745).

In this passage, Paul argues that the standard by which believers are to truly worship God is total dedication to Him, which results in mental and moral transformation so God’s will may be discerned (12:1-2). From there, he argues that the evidence that believers are totally dedicated to God is their humble commitment to the one church in all the diversity of its members and their gifts (12:3-8). Paul’s argument in 12:1-8, therefore, is that the standard for the Christian life is total commitment to God, resulting in an understanding of God’s will and evidenced in humble commitment to the one church in all its diversity.

Exegetical Commentary

I. Total Commitment to God as the Standard of True Worship (12:1-2)

The theme of unity frames this exhortational section of Romans (cf. 12:3-8; 15:7-13). “Once it becomes clear that the entire paraenetic section is framed by exhortations which
stress mutual acceptance and the unity of the community, a context for the interpretation of 12:1-2 emerges. The living, holy, and acceptable ‘sacrifice’ for which Paul calls for is that of the community.”

With this in mind, the purpose of 12:1-2 is not to call for a spiritual, inward kind of sacrifice, as opposed to the cultic, outward kind. Instead, “it is to ask for a sacrifice which is communal rather than factional, a sacrifice which God’s will (expressed in 1:18-11:36) has made [proper] for the Romans because it is through that will that they can be one body in Christ.”

A. True Worship is Total Commitment to God (12:1)

12:1 As noted above, Paul’s use of “therefore” (οὖν) marks a major transition in his epistle to the Romans, but it does so by building on everything that Paul has argued in Rom 1-11. That the “therefore” is referring back to the entirety of the letter is clear from the repetition of words used earlier in the epistle. For instance, Paul’s mention in this verse of the “mercies of God” has the force of “evoking earlier references to the grace and love of God” (Jewett 727).

Paul also appears to be contrasting the “renewed mind” with the depraved and corrupted mind of 1:28, and his call for believers to “present themselves as living sacrifices” echoes the language of 6:13-19 (Moo, 748).

Paul uses a particularly strong verb (παρακαλέω) to introduce his exhortations. This verb has a wide range of meaning, but here has a nuance of “to urge strongly” (BDAG, 765 s.v.). As with Paul’s other exhortations, these “do not merely contain good advice or his preferences. They represent the authoritative will of God and are enjoined upon churches in a solemn

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2 Smiga, 270.

3 Jewett offers Rom 1:5, 7; 3:24; 4:4, 16; 5:2, 15-21; 6:1, 14-17; 11:5-6 as examples.

4 παρακαλέω is a common Pauline word for introducing moral exhortation in his letters; see, for instance, 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 10:1; Eph 4:1; Phil 4:2; 1 Thess 4:1; 1 Tim 2:1.
manner” (Schreiner, 642). Paul further states that “God’s mercies” (Rom 1-11) are the reason (διά) why believers should listen to his exhortation.\(^5\)

The recipients of Paul’s exhortation are believers in Christ, his “brothers and sisters” (ἀδελφοί). This word ἀδελφοί shows that these instructions are for the family of God; in other words, “The appeal Paul made here is directly applicable only to those who by faith have personally received Jesus Christ as their redeemer.”\(^6\)

The content of Paul’s exhortation is that Christians give their whole selves to God. This is described in the imagery of presenting one’s body as a sacrifice to God. This language closely echoes the language of Greco-Roman religion. It would not be an overstatement to say that cultic terminology “dominates” this verse (Schreiner, 644). To give just one example, the word “sacrifice” (θυσία) was used in Greco-Roman religion to symbolize personal devotion, and that it is described as a “living” sacrifice calls to mind “the ethical criticism of literal sacrifice and the coming of a figurative and mystical concept of sacrifice” found in the Hebrew prophets and in Hellenistic Judaism (Odeberg, \textit{TDNT} 3.189).

Paul adds that this kind of sacrifice is characterized by the fact that it is alive, holy, and pleasing to God; all three of these words also have overt cultic associations. It is possible that Paul is here alluding to an Old Testament precedent, namely, the Azazel-goat of Lev 16, which makes sense of the Old Testament ritual language. Kiuchi, who argues for this view, concludes that “Paul, by alluding to the Azazel-goat ritual, exhorts believers to present their bodies as a sacrifice; in other words, to live a self-sacrificial life,” with the live animal sacrifice of this goat being paralleled by the living human sacrifice of the life of the Christian.\(^7\) The sum picture is

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\(^5\) While the preposition διά could here have an instrumental meaning (so Dunn, 709), the causal force makes more sense as the basis for an exhortation, though perhaps both are in view here to some extent (Schreiner, 643).


one in which “the thought of sacrifice has been transposed across a double line - from cultic
ritual to everyday life, from a previous epoch characterized by daily offerings of animals to one
characterized by a whole-person commitment lived out in daily existence” (Dunn, 710).

This action of “presenting” one’s body as a sacrifice is, significantly, best understood as
a continuous action; the aorist infinitive does not represent a once-for-all action, as advocates
of entire sanctification might want to argue, because this misunderstands the meaning of the
aorist tense (Schreiner, 643). Instead, the aorist is best understood as describing the action as a
whole. That “body” most likely here refers to one’s physical body is evident from the fact that
Paul will go on to speak of the “mind” in 12:2, thus underscoring the totality of the sacrifice
Paul has in mind.

The final clause, “which is your spiritual service of worship,” stands in apposition to the
preceding clause. The term “spiritual” (λογικός) is an unusual word, usually found in Greco-
Roman philosophy and mysticism, but here used to “spiritualize” cultic worship (Kittel, TDNT
4.142). Käsemann points out the paradox of Paul using cultic vocabulary in what amounts to a
condemnation of regular cultic worship, concluding, “Christian worship does not consist of
what is practiced at sacred sites, at sacred times, and with sacred acts;” instead, spiritual
worship “takes place in daily life, whereby every Christian is simultaneously sacrifice and
priest” (Käsemann, 329). David Peterson argues against those, like Käsemann, who seem to
understand Christian sacrifice as exclusively spiritual. If this word is translated “spiritual,” care
must be taken lest it be interpreted to mean only the inward form of Christian worship to the
exclusion of the physical sacrifice of the body. And if this word is translated “rational,” it
suggests a mere contrast with the sacrifice of irrational animals. A more comprehensive term

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8 Cf. the discussion of the aorist tense in ExSyn, 554-557.
9 Hiebert, 314.
is thus needed. Peterson suggests the kind of service Paul is encouraging is “the obedience of faith expressed by those whose minds are being transformed and renewed by God,” and so “consequently, it may be best to read ‘understanding worship,’ and to recognize from the context that this means ‘the worship which is consonant with the truth of the gospel.’” This reading correctly links Paul’s understanding of the Christian life and worship with the gospel he has presented in his letter thus far.

B. Result: Transformation and the Renewing of the Mind (12:2a)

12:2 The conjunction καί logically ties this verse to the one that preceded it; the point seems to be that “the call for presentation in verse 1 is foundational to this resultant duty of inner transformation.” Hiebert helpfully breaks this verse into the hindrance to transformation, the nature of the transformation, and the result of the transformation.

First, Paul identifies what hinders believers from being transformed in the process of giving one’s self wholly to God. For Paul, conforming to the ways of this age blocks Christian growth. To the exclusion of any interpretation which argues Paul is only speaking of outward conformity to the ways of the world, the word he uses refers to the total nature of existence. When Paul speaks of “this age,” he is drawing on the distinction of Jewish apocalyptic between the present, evil age and the blessed age to come. But as opposed to mainstream Jewish apocalyptic, the early Christians believed that in light of the resurrection of Christ, “the new aeon has begun already, though as yet concealed from the eyes of men” (Sasse, TDNT 1.205-7).

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11 Peterson, 275.
12 Hiebert, 319.
13 Hiebert, 319-322.
14 Cf. the discussion by Behm, TDNT 4.743-744, who concludes that μορφή and σχῆμα (the root words of the two imperatives in Rom 12:2) are used more or less interchangeably. Their interchangeable use can also be seen in 1 Cor 7:31; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 2:6-7; Phil 3:21.
Paul, therefore, is calling on the Romans to recognize that the eschatological age has begun and to live accordingly.

Second, Paul describes the nature of the transformation that results from giving one’s self to God, which is the renewing of the mind. When Paul speaks of the mind (νοῦς), he is referring to “the sum total of the whole mental and moral state of being” (BDAG, 680 s.v.). Paul is contrasting the “renewed” mind of the Christian with the “depraved” mind of the non-Christian in 1:28. The present tense of the imperative\(^\text{15}\) indicates a continuing process, in which sanctification is not a one-time decision but rather a “lifelong process by which our way of thinking is to resemble more and more the way God wants us to think” (Moo, 757).

C. Purpose: Discerning God’s Will (12:2b)

Finally, Paul discusses the purpose of this transformation.\(^\text{16}\) The “renewing of the mind”\(^\text{17}\) is intended to allow the believer to “approve the will of God;” that is, to understand in order to obey God’s moral direction, which Paul describes as “good, acceptable, and perfect.”\(^\text{18}\) Again, Paul is deliberately contrasting the mind of the regenerate person with that of the unregenerate pictured in 1:28. Whereas a depraved mind leads to actions that should not be done (1:28), a renewed mind leads to actions that are in harmony with God’s will (12:2). This point is especially significant for those who view Christians as not under the OT law: for if Christians are no longer under the law (cf. 5:20; 6:14-15), what is their guide for ethical

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\(^{15}\) In this verse, the imperatives συσχηματίζεσθε and μεταμορφοῦσθε are found in the earliest and best MSS (especially the primary Alexandrian witnesses P46 and B*), while later MSS contain the infinitive forms instead. The imperatives should be considered original because of the stronger external evidence; the change to the infinitives could be considered a scribal “improvement” to Paul’s Greek here.

\(^{16}\) The εἰς τό plus verb structure can indicate purpose (ExSyn, 591); this seems to best fit Paul’s point here, though it may also denote result.

\(^{17}\) There is a textual problem here, with the Byzantine text-type (plus the support of η) adding ὑμῶν after νοῶς ("your mind"). But this can clearly be seen to be a later addition, with P46, B, and D* among others favoring the omission, which is also the more difficult (ambiguous) reading.

\(^{18}\) These three adjectives are most likely in apposition to “the will of God.” Cf. Moo, 757.
behavior? Here Paul seems to be arguing that it is the renewing of the mind that serves this role; comparing this verse with Paul’s description of the role of the Spirit in sanctification (cf. 8:5-6), it is clear that Paul sees the renewing of the mind and the transforming work of the Spirit as similar, if not identical, processes. Thus, “Paul’s confidence in the mind of the Christian is the result of his understanding of the work of the Spirit, who is actively working to effect the renewal in thinking that Paul here assumes” (Moo, 757).

II. Humble Commitment to the Church as Evidence of Total Commitment to God (12:3-8)

Though with this new section Käsemann sees “an unusually sharp break from vv. 1-2,” (Käsemann, 332), the presence of the conjunction γάρ (“for”) in verse 3 indicates that 12:3-8 logically follows from 12:1-2. In other words, “The exhortations in verses 3-8 flow out of the call for total commitment to God expressed in verses 1-2 and describe more concretely and practically the nature of that commitment” (Schreiner, 650). And, significantly, Paul deals first and foremost with community life. “Perhaps,” writes Moo, “Paul is especially concerned that believers not take too individualistic an approach to transformation. Thus he wants us to recognize that the transformation of character is seen especially in our relationships with one another” (Moo, 759).

In this section, Paul begins by exhorting the Romans to not be prideful, but to think honestly about themselves (12:3). He then gives the basis for this exhortation, which is the unity and diversity of the body of Christ (12:4-5). Finally, he describes some of the spiritual gifts which contribute to that unity and diversity (12:6-8).

A. Humility as the Foundational Attitude in the Church (12:3)

12:3 Paul introduces this section by appealing once again to his apostolic authority.19 It is through the grace given by God to Paul that the Apostle is able to make the subsequent

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19 For similar appeals in the Pauline corpus, Schreiner lists Rom 15:15-16; 1 Cor 3:10; 15:9-10; Gal 2:9; Eph 3:2, 7-8; 1 Tim 1:12 (651).
When Paul speaks of the “grace” (χάρις) he had received, he is linking back to the grace which gave rise to his apostleship (1:5) and looking forward in this very passage to the related word “gift” (χαρίσμα, 12:6). In his own life as well as in the lives of his Romans readers, Paul is tracing a movement from “χάρις as the divine commissioning and enabling which comes to concrete expression in χαρίσμα” (Dunn, 720; cf. Rom 1:11-12). Though all have received the same χάρις, Paul will go on to show that believers have been given different χαρίσμα. The somewhat awkward syntax at the end of this opening clause (“to every one of you”) is emphatic, highlighting that he is making this exhortation to every believer in Rome (Cranfield, 612).

As in the previous verse, Paul uses contrasting imperatives to make his point, beginning with a negative and concluding with a positive command. First, he says what not to do, namely, one should not think more highly of oneself than one ought to think. In contrast, he goes on, one should think sensibly or reasonably about oneself. Paul is making a deliberate play on one Greek root (φρονέω, “to think”), which occurs three times in this verse. In particular, Paul is contrasting two kinds of thinking about oneself by using two different verbs that build off this root. On the one hand, there is excessive pride that goes beyond what is proper (ὑποφρονέω); on the other, there is the correct, sober self-judgment (σωφονέω). This latter verb is significant, as it “features regularly in popular hellenistic philosophy denoting modesty and restraint, in classical terms the golden mean between license and stupidity, and one of the four cardinal virtues” (Dunn, 721).

Paul is thus purposefully using language that will resonate with his Greco-Roman audience, particularly those who are familiar with Stoic ideas. Esler argues that while “it is

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20 The preposition διά with the genitive, as in this verse, has a meaning of “through” (cf. BDF §223).

21 This verb adds the prefix ὑπερ to the root verb, which can have a sense of “above and beyond” (cf. BDAG s.v. ὑπερ B). This is matched by the preposition παρά, which has a comparative force here (cf. BDAG s.v. παρά C.3).
clear that Paul shares with the Stoics this type of concern for the cognitive dimension of human existence,” it is notable that “the source of the rationality Paul has in mind is quite different from that of the Stoics.”\textsuperscript{22} Whereas Stoic ethics did not emphasize community life, Paul instead ties “right thinking” (σωφονέω) with how one relates to others. “It is hard to resist the conclusion that [Paul] is here offering a rival vision of human behavior which picks up the Stoics’ best insights, but integrates them into a new and distinctive product.”\textsuperscript{23}

Paul concludes this sentence with the clause, “to each one as God apportioned a measure of faith.” This last phrase, “measure of faith” (μέτρον πίστεως) is difficult to interpret. Amidst a plethora of interpretive options, two of the most often defended are that Paul is either (1) speaking of the “standard of faith,” who is Christ Jesus (so Cranfield, 616; to an extent Moo, 761), and (2) alluding to the “amount of faith” which each believer possesses (so Schreiner, 653; Dunn, 721).\textsuperscript{24} The latter is to be preferred. The closest parallel to this verse (2 Cor 10:13), which uses the same verb “to apportion” (μερίζω) with the same noun “measure” as does this verse, clearly describes God appointing different ministries to the apostles (Dunn, 721).

Second, Paul is clear in other passages, such as Rom 14:1, that believers have different levels of faith, and Paul’s exhortation against boasting makes perfect sense in this context. Whereas Paul could have said believers have equal faith as an argument against self-boasting, he instead argues that “what prevents pride from cropping up is a sober estimation of one’s faith, and this sober estimation is based on the truth that God apportioned to each one a measure of

\textsuperscript{22} Philip F. Esler, “Paul and Stoicism: Romans 12 as a Test Case,” in \textit{NTS} 50 (2004), 115.

\textsuperscript{23} Esler, 116.

\textsuperscript{24} One new interpretation worth mentioning has been offered by John C. Poirier, who takes πίστις here to mean “trusteeship” or “stewardship.” Though this meaning does not occur in BDAG, it seems to occur in Plutarch, Polybius, and Josephus. The phrase would thus be interpreted as “God’s entrusting of a calling or task (as listed in vv. 6-8).” It seems just possible that this could be the case, but goes so far against Paul’s normal usage that a skeptical attitude toward this view is probably warranted. See Poirier, “The Measure of Stewardship: πίστις in Romans 12:3,” in \textit{TynBull} 59 (2008), 146-152.
faith” (Schreiner, 653). Because faith is a gift of God (Eph 2:8-9), boasting in one’s own level of faith is excluded.

This opening sentence is necessary for Paul’s argument in the rest of this passage, as this kind of attitude is necessary for the Romans to properly exercise their spiritual gifts, which Paul will go on to describe in 12:6-8.

B. The Unity and Diversity of the Church (12:4-5)

In 12:4-5, Paul gives the basis for his exhortation by introducing the imagery of the body to speak to the unity and diversity of the Christian community, an image he first used in 1 Cor 12 and develops further in Eph 4 and Col 2. The conjunction γὰρ (“for”) again indicates that Paul is moving forward in his argument, in this case elaborating on why believers should not be overly boastful of themselves. Paul uses the structure of a “just as... so also” (καθάπερ... οὕτως) comparison to make his point.

12:4 This verse gives the first half of the comparison (“just as”) and describes two facts: first, that a body has many parts; second, that the parts each have different functions. In other words, “Paul emphasizes that the human body is characterized by both unity and diversity” (Schreiner, 654). Paul elaborates on this point in 1 Cor 12:12-31, in which he argues that different parts of the body, such as an ear, an eye, or a hand, each play unique and necessary roles, and that together these different body parts contribute more to the human person than would be possible if the human body were, instead, one giant ear or one enormous eye. It is precisely this picture which Paul will apply to believers and the church in the following verse.

The question of the origin of the body imagery Paul uses is the “most difficult riddle in the whole literature of mysticism” (Käsemann, 336). Dunn gives no less than eight possible explanations for the origin of this imagery, but concludes that “to search for a single origin for the body of Christ imagery is therefore probably too much of an oversimplification; several
influences can be traced in it” (Dunn, 724). No matter what the exact origins of this metaphor, Paul’s point is crystal clear: the church, like the body, is characterized by both unity and diversity.

12:5 This verse presents the second half of the comparison (“so also”), in which Paul applies the imagery of the human body (12:4) to the body of Christ. “Paul, working from the assumption of the unity of the body, argues for the need to recognize a healthy diversity within that one body” (Moo, 763). Paul’s argument here is again parallel to that of 1 Cor 12:12-31, where he uses the same metaphor to address the same topic of unity and diversity in the body.

Two further observations can be made. First, Paul specifies that the oneness of the body is “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ). Paul’s “in Christ” language has been used in Romans to describe believers (5:16, 18; 8:1), and speaks to the Christian’s organic connection to Christ. Thus, the notion of mystical or organic union with Christ is not merely between an individual believer and Christ, but between the corporate body of believers and Christ, in whom the oneness of the body is located.

Second, Dunn makes a particularly astute observation when he notes that “the point is that the body is one not despite its diversity, but is one body only by virtue of its diversity; without that diversity the body would be a monstrosity” (Dunn, 725). It is, therefore, precisely this characteristic, necessary diversity of the body, as opposed to a “flat kind of equality” among the members, which sets up Paul’s discussion of diversity of gifts in the following verses (Schreiner, 654). As Paul goes on to speak of the diversity of the body, his readers are not to lose sight of the fact that this diversity is a welcome, essential contribution to the unity of the body.

C. Diversity of Spiritual Gifts, for the Unity of the Church (12:6-8)

In Rom 12:6-8, “the analogy of the church to the human body is applied to the gifts present in the community” (Schreiner, 654). But precisely how Paul is connecting these verses
to 12:4-5 is a matter of debate, particularly in regards to the participle (ἔχοντες) that begins 12:6. Most commentators take the position that the participle begins a new sentence (so Murray, 2.121; Cranfield, 618; Moo, 764), while a minority argues that 12:4-8 consists of one long sentence (so Dunn, 725). Faced with the absence of a main verb in 12:6-8, the majority view reads the description of each gift with an “underlying hortatory sense” (Moo, 764), and has the advantage of being relatively smooth and better able to explain the postpositive δέ after the participle. This is reflected in most translations (so KJV, NIV, TEV, ESV, NET).

Kenneth Berding has recently made a strong case for why the one-sentence view is to be preferred.25 According to Berding, the participle is best understood as modifying the verb “we are” (ἐσμεν, 12:5) before each of the following prepositional phrases. His strongest evidence for this is that the adjective “different” (διάφορα) does not merely modify the noun “gift,” but (because it is located at the end of the participial clause and precedes the list of the different gifts), it “distributes the list that follows and differentiates the various areas of ministry and attitudes through his use of this adjective.”26 This understanding is to be preferred because it makes clear Paul’s point that everyone has a specific role to play in the body and thus all are needed by each other, instead of making the issue of spiritual gifts only loosely connected to the topic of unity and humility toward one another in 12:3-5.27

12:6 Thus, in light of the fact that the body is characterized by unity and diversity, Paul applies this understanding to the issue of spiritual gifts, declaring that every believer has a different gift (χαρίσμα), which has been given by God “according to the grace (χάρις) given to

25 For all seven reasons he gives, see Kenneth Berding, “Romans 12:4-8: One Sentence or Two?” NTS 52 (2006), 433-439. Regarding the issue of the δέ, Berding takes it “as a connective on a lower level that functions more or less in the same way as the δέ in the immediately preceding phrase,” for “since such a function of δέ exists in the preceding phrase (v. 5), it at least opens up the possibility that δέ is similarly employed in the participial clause under consideration (v. 6)” (Berding, 438).

26 Berding, 435.

27 Berding, 436-437.
us.” In this verse, Paul is explicitly connecting gift and grace, a link that was foreshadowed as far back as 12:3. “Particularly evident here is the character of χαρίσμα as the embodiment, concrete manifestation in word or action, of χάρις” (Dunn, 725). Or, put another way, the χαρίσμα are the visible evidence of God’s χάρις working its way out in a community of mutually supportive believers. Paul will now elaborate on the nature of some of these grace-driven gifts.

The first gift that Paul mentions is that of prophecy. In Paul’s day, a prophet “was distinguished from the teacher by the immediacy of his inspiration: his utterance was the result of a particular revelation” (Cranfield, 620). That prophecy is listed first is not surprising, given the high esteem Paul placed on it, as in 1 Cor 12:28 (Schreiner, 655). Paul emphasizes that this gift, as with the others, comes about according to the “measure of faith” of the individual. The phrase Paul uses here (ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως) poses the same interpretive problems as what appears to be a synonymous phrase in 12:3 (μέτρον πίστεως).

The faith of the individual again appears to be in view, not only for the reasons advanced earlier but also because this phrase seems to be standing in parallel to the phrase “according to the grace given to us” earlier in this verse, “clearly implying that the faith is the faith exercised by the one who prophesies” (Dunn, 728). Given Berding’s arguments above, this phrase - and the ones that follow it - must be read as descriptive, not prescriptive, with the introductory conjunctions (εἴτε) being translated “whether” and “or.” While Paul may be describing an ideal that does not yet exist for the church in Rome, his language is nevertheless descriptive of “what being one body in Christ involves” (Dunn, 725). Paul’s idea is thus that “we are all one body in Christ,” (12:5) all of us “having gifts which differ in accordance with the grace given to us,

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28 Unfortunately, given space constraints, a detailed discussion of the nature of each gift in 12:7-8 is not possible here; see the commentaries for a full discussion of each.

29 It may be that ἀναλογία has a slightly different nuance than μέτρον, perhaps emphasizing the mathematical idea of proportion more than measure (cf. BDAG s.v. ἀναλογία), but these appear to be more or less synonymous terms.

30 Note the parallel use of κατά to introduce both phrases.
whether prophecy in proportion to faith,” or another of the gifts that Paul will go on to describe (12:6-8).

12:7-8 Paul now describes six more spiritual gifts which represent the outworking of the diversity of spiritual gifts which contribute to the unity of the church. The “unity and diversity” of Paul’s syntax in these verses, however, causes some interpretive difficulties.

What seems to be clear is that Paul divides these gifts into two groups of three. The three gifts of the first group (service, teaching, and encouragement) are distinguished by their common syntax.31 Dunn argues that the repetition used in this group “is not simply tautologous, but underlines the basic characteristic of a charism for Paul as grace (χάρις) coming to visible expression (χαρίσμα)” (Dunn, 729). Grace works itself out through the various spiritual gifts in concrete actions that benefit the community. The three gifts of the second group (giving, leadership, and showing mercy), are again linked together with common syntax,32 though the reason for the change in syntax is unclear (Moo, 767). These gifts are also examples of grace-bestowed gifts that are working for the profit of the entire community.

Berding sees a link between the description of each gift and the statement “different (διάφορα) gifts (χαρίσματα) according to the grace given to us” in 12:6, the clause which immediately precedes the list of gifts. Paul intends for us “to read the first half of each pair (the functions themselves and the persons in those functions) under χαρίσματα and the second half of each pair (each prepositional phrase) under διάφορα.”33 Taking the gift of service as an

31 Specifically, each of them is introduced by the conjunction εἴτε and concludes with a dative participial phrase (ἐν plus a cognate noun in the dative case) used in reference to the gift named (Schreiner, 656). Starting with the gift of teaching, though, the formula is slightly different, as a substantival participle follows the εἴτε after the second and third gifts in the group, as opposed to the nominal form of the gift itself, as with the prior two gifts. This is probably just a stylistic difference (so Moo, 767), but note Dunn’s minority position in seeing Paul as using the change in syntax to highlight certain roles (Dunn, 729).

32 Specifically, the εἴτε has dropped out, though its force continues implicitly, and the ἐν is now followed by a distinctive, non-cognate noun.

33 Berding, 437.
example, the amplified force of each phrase would then be “whether (we are having) service (differing from other members) in (one’s ministry of) teaching.”\(^{34}\) This is by no means an elegant solution, but it does seem to provide less interpretive problems than the view which wants to insert a hortatory verb or phrase into each clause. This list of spiritual gifts, therefore, describes the outworking of the diversity of spiritual gifts for the sake of the unity of the body.

**Conclusion and Application**

In this passage, Paul has begun to unpack the nature of a Christian life lived in response to the gospel he has described in Rom 1-11. He first argues that the standard by which believers are to truly worship God is total dedication to Him, which results in mental and moral transformation so God’s will may be discerned (12:1-2). The evidence that believers are totally dedicated to God is their humble commitment to the church (12:3-8), for the result of a renewed life is humility, which is the evidence of transformation exhibited in interpersonal relationships in the church (12:3). The reason a believer should be humble, Paul argues, is because of the unity and diversity of the church (12:4-5). The application of the diversity of the body to its individual members, Paul concludes, is the diversity of their spiritual gifts (12:6-8).

The application for the church and for each of us as believers in Christ is, first and foremost, to give the entirety of our lives to God (cf. 12:1-2). This means giving God the best of our time and money, and the firstfruits of our labor and strength. Second, we must do this in a way that is not individualistic but communal: there are no “lone-ranger” Christians. “Understanding that Christians belong to one another in one body and have in common the same grace of God (v. 5) and faith (vv. 3, 6) will help to stifle exaggerated ideas about one’s own status or ministry” (Moo, 758). And not only that, but Christians will use their unique gifting in ways that will build one another up, making the church a beacon of hope and light to a hopeless and dark world.

\(^{34}\) Berding, 439.