

That We Might Bear Fruit For God

Lesson 12

The Christian's mind renewed to the exercise of his individual allotment in the body of Christ. (Romans 12:3-8).

By F. M. Perry

“(3) For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. (4) For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, (5) so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (6) And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; (7) if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; (8) or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Romans 12:3-8 NASV).

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The Christian's mind renewed to the exercise of his individual allotment in the body of Christ. (Romans 12:2-8).

Questions for study:

1. Why do people, even Christians, have a tendency "to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think?" (Romans 12:3). Did not Adam and Eve have this problem even as they walked with God in the Garden of Eden? (Genesis 3:6, 22). To what might this problem lead in the lives of people? (Romans 1:18-32; 10:2, 21; 11:8-9).
2. What was Christ's answer to Peter and His disciples when this problem exhibited itself in their lives? (Matthew 16:22-26). What antidote did Paul prescribe to counter this tendency to think too highly of oneself? (Romans 12:3; Philippians 2:5-8).
3. What has God allotted to every Christian? (Romans 12:3). What does this allotment allow the Christian to do? What are the allotment's limits? How does the Christian find out what his allotment is, and what he must do with it?
4. When a Christian "thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think," what is he apt to do with his "measure of faith?"
5. How are the seven "gifts" mentioned in Romans 12:6-8 imparted to Christians? Were they imparted by the Holy Spirit through the "laying on" of the Apostle's hands as were the miraculous gifts Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30? How do the seven gifts of Romans 12:6-8 differ from the miraculous gifts of 1 Corinthians 12? Are the seven gifts of Romans 12:6-8 given to Christians today. Does every Christian have all of them?
6. Was our "old man" who was "conformed to this world" have any

characteristics which might have been useful in the life of our “new man” who is being “transformed?” What should be the Christian’s attitude toward the use of “old talents” in his “transformed” life, talents which were developed before he gave his life to God as a Christian?

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Lesson 12. The Christian's mind renewed to the exercise of his individual allotment in the body of Christ. (Romans 12:3-8).

Questions for study.

1. Why do people, even Christians, have a tendency "to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think?" (Romans 12:3). Did not Adam and Eve have this problem even as they walked with God in the Garden of Eden? (Genesis 3:5, 22). To what might this problem lead in the lives of people? (Romans 1:18-32; 10:2, 21; 11:8-9).

It seems to be characteristic of mankind, descended from Adam, to want to exercise his will power strongly. With many people trying to exercise their own individual wills simultaneously, a number of wills come in conflict. When a person insists that his will must be exercised even when it is in conflict with the wills of others, he is thinking more highly of himself than of others. For Christians to have this clash of wills among them, one or more must be thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think for God does not guide His work in Christians through the Christian's independent exercise of will.

Adam and Eve fell for Satan's big lie which in essence conned them into thinking that they could have a better life through the exercise of their own wills rather than obedience to God's instructions. So when Adam and Eve erroneously "saw" through their own selfish wills that "the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise," they exercised their wills in contradiction to God's instructions and ate the fruit of the tree. They thought of themselves more highly than they thought of God, which was more highly than they ought to have thought. It led them into sin.

Similarly, people of the world, since the creation, have thought more highly of their own wills than they ought to have thought, more highly than of the will of God expressed in various ways to them. This characteristic has led people to suppress the truth of God in

unrighteousness and to put themselves in danger of the wrath of God. (Romans 1:18-32). God's Children of Israel sought to establish their own way rather than to subject themselves to the righteousness of God. They thought more highly of themselves than they ought to have thought. The result was that they became a disobedient and obstinate people whom God hardened by giving them a spirit of stupor. (Romans 10:2, 21; 11:8-9).

We will not yield ourselves to the guidance of God's Holy Spirit if we think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. The teachings of Romans, chapters 6, 7, and 8 are that there is no room for the exercise of our own individual wills in our "walk according to the Spirit." Jesus said that we must lose our souls (including our selfish wills, minds, and emotions) with respect to ourselves if we are to gain our souls for an eternity with God. (Matthew 16:25). To think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think is tantamount to clinging to our own soul's prerogatives. Jesus warned against it and died to make a better way possible.

2. What was Christ's answer to Peter and His disciples when this problem exhibited itself in their lives? (Matthew 16:22-26). What antidote did Paul prescribe to counter this tendency to think too highly of oneself? (Romans 12:3; Philippians 2:5-8).

When Jesus told his disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and be killed, Peter pitted the meager and faulty understanding of his own mind and his own will against that of Jesus. Because the prediction by Jesus of His coming death did not appeal to the mind of Peter, Peter expressed his own mind of which he thought more highly than he ought to have thought. Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:22-26). In other words, Jesus was saying that in Peter's state of worldly mind the expression of his mind to hinder the coming death of Jesus was tantamount to the expression of Satan's mind.

When one Christian within a congregation of Christians "thinks more

highly of himself than he ought to think," and conflict then arises over his insistence on application of human thinking, such conflict is Satan inspired, is it not? This ever present problem of human pride lies at the base of much of our sin problem, does it not?

The antidote to this evil way of thinking is "to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." (Romans 12:3). Only God can transform and renew the minds of Christians. Instead of following human tendencies, we must follow the renewed mind God has given to us. In transforming us, God allotted to each of us a "measure of faith." Our thinking must be conformed to that which God has allotted to us. God works through us. It is not we ourselves who work. So we must learn to think in accordance with this principle. This is where the Holy Spirit leads in our walk through the new life.

Jesus aptly demonstrated to us the attitude which allows a renewing of the mind and brings about a transformed life. Jesus was called upon to accept a transformation from existence in the form of God and in equality with God, to be made in the likeness of men. Although His transformation was in the opposite direction of our transformation, He demonstrated an attitude that is like the attitude we are called upon to have. "He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." So Paul tells us to "have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5-8).

3. What has God allotted every Christian? (Romans 12:3). What does this allotment allow the Christian to do? What are the allotment's limits? How does the Christian find out what his allotment is, and what he must do with it?

"God has allotted to each a measure of faith". (Romans 12:3). This allotment of faith allows the Christian to carry out God's purpose in his life. Christians do not know the allotment's limits except that they know it is enough faith for them to accomplish all that God has purposed for their life in Christ. The amount of faith allotted to Christians surely must be far more than many have appropriated.

" Have you, as a Christian, appropriated into your life all the faith which God has allotted to you? Remember that Jesus often chided His disciples with the comment, "Oh you of little faith." (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). Jesus revealed a principle concerning God's allotment of faith when two blind men approached Him asking to be healed. "Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then He touched their eyes saying, 'Be it done to you according to your faith. '" (Matthew 9:28-29). Jesus again revealed the principle to His disciples once when the disciples had tried to cast a demon out of someone but had failed. "Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast it out?' And He said to them, 'Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there', and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you.'" (Matthew 17: 19-20) ."

What great things has God purposed to be done through you? If we don't walk in accordance with the measure of faith which God has allotted to us, we are not going to allow God to accomplish in us that which He desires to accomplish. We hinder God's use of us by our acceptance of only a meager portion of God's allotment for us. We are only willing to follow the Holy Spirit in our walk to the limit of the meager amount of faith we have accepted from God!

How does the Christian find out what his allotment is, and what he must do with it? It appears that the Christian's allotment of faith is defined only in terms of what God calls upon the Christian to do with it. And what the Christian is called upon to do is unfolded to him by the leading of God's Holy Spirit in his daily walk.

4. When a Christian "thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think," what is he apt to do with his "measure of faith?"

When a Christian "thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think," he is apt to plan and execute his life in accordance with only his limited personal resources. He then becomes guilty of the same sin as that of Adam and Eve. He has exchanged his walk in the Holy Spirit

with God for a walk under law in which he is doomed to defeat. He has abandoned his "measure of faith." As the Old Testament prophet has said, and as Paul has reminded us, "the righteous man shall live by faith." (Romans 1:17). Living by faith, God counts us as righteous men. And God accomplishes His purposes through those whom He counts as righteous.

5. How are the seven "gifts" mentioned in Romans 12:6-8 imparted to Christians? Were they imparted by the Holy Spirit through the "laying on" of the Apostle's hands as were the miraculous gifts Paul wrote about in 1st Corinthians 12:28-30? How do the seven gifts of Romans 12:6-8 differ from the miraculous gifts of 1st Corinthians 12? Are the seven gifts of Romans 12:6-8 given to Christians today? Does every Christian have all of them?

The gifts Paul wrote about in 1st Corinthians 12:28-30 appear to be special gifts which God imparted to some men during the brief period of early church history when the Apostles of Jesus were still alive. At that time God's New Testament word was not yet written and/or collected into a publicly available book. Some Christians upon whom the Apostles had laid their hands were enabled to call upon the Holy Spirit to miraculously impart knowledge of God's word and to perform miraculous healing of the sick. In fact there seems to be a miraculous element in each of the gifts mentioned in 1st Corinthians 12:28-30.

Immediately after Paul enumerated the miraculous gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:28-30, he said, "But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way." (1st Corinthians 12:31). The "greater gifts" of which he wrote are shown in 1st Corinthians, chapter 13, to be the gifts of "faith, hope, and love," gifts that God will impart to all Christians no matter which part of the New Testament covenant time in which they live. It is to this gift of faith then that Paul refers in Romans 12:3 when he wrote of the "measure of faith" allotted by God to Christians. (Is it not only reasonable for Christians to understand that they are allotted definite measures of hope and love as well as a measure of faith?)

The gifts enumerated in Romans 12:6-8 appear to be gifts which are to be used in the Christian's exercise of his allotment of faith.

(1) The gift of "prophecy" very likely refers to a talent for preaching the gospel. The word "prophecy" comes from the Greek word PROPBETEIA which means "public exposition."

(2) The gift of "service" ("ministry," KJ) is simply the ability to serve in assisting people to faith and obedience. The word "service" comes from the Greek word DIAKONIA which means "ministration" or "ministry." It appears to come from the same root as the Greek word for "deacon."

(3) The gift of "teaching" is simply the talent for helping people learn the message of the word of God. The word "teaching" comes from the Greek word DIDASKALOS which means "teaching" or "instruction."

(4) The gift of "exhortation" simply refers to a talent for calling people to the purposes of God. The word "exhortation" comes from the Greek word PARAKLESIS which means "a calling near" or "a calling for" something.

(5) The gift of "giving with liberality (simplicity, KJ)" refers to the Christian's giving (probably of money or any medium of exchange) as a part of serving God's purposes. A specific example of giving was recorded by Paul when he called on the Christians of Galatia and Corinth to give to the poor saints in Jerusalem (1st Corinthians 16:1-3; 2nd Corinthians 8:1-24; 9:1-15). The word "giving" comes from the Greek word METADIDOMI which means "to give a share." The word "liberality" comes from the Greek word BAPLOTES which means "simplicity."

(6) The gift of "leading (ruling, KJ) with diligence" refers to an ability to give aid to people in rendering obedience of faith to God. The word "leads (ruleth, KJ)" comes from the Greek word PROISTEMI which means "to set or place over or before." The word "diligence" comes from the Greek word SPOUDE which means "haste" or "speed."

Perhaps there is a thought here that a Christian should not neglect his gift of ability to lead.

(7) The gift of "showing mercy with cheerfulness" refers to the Christian's ability to allow God to exercise His mercy through the Christian. The words "shows mercy" come from the Greek word ELEEEO which means "to be kind, beneficent." The word "cheerfulness" comes from the Greek word HILAROTES which means "hilarity" or "cheerfulness."

These seven gifts are referred to by Paul as gifts that we, as Christians, have. ("Since we have gifts".) It was not necessary that Christians have the Apostles' hands laid upon them in order to have these gifts. They are gifts "according to the grace given to us," that is, each of us, by God. Does every Christian have all of these seven gifts? Not necessarily. In fact, the Christian's possession of one or more of these gifts differs in accordance with the grace given to him.

Paul concludes that since we differ in the gifts we have, and that since we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members one of another, we must exercise the gifts we do have accordingly. The message seems to be that gifts are given by God for a purpose and therefore should be diligently exercised to that purpose. If they are not, the measure of faith allotted to a Christian is not available for God's use in accomplishing His purposes.

6. Did our "old man" who was "conformed to this world" have any characteristics which might have been useful in the life of our "new man" who is being "transformed?" What should be the Christian's attitude toward the use of "old talents" in his "transformed" life, talents which were developed before he gave his life to God as a Christian?

The answers to these questions might better be left for the Holy Spirit of God to answer in His leading of our walk in a "new" "transformed" life. Before we were baptized into Christ we certainly were living in our "old man" of the world. Before we were baptized into Christ we had not been "born of water and the Spirit" and therefore had not begun to be

"transformed by the renewing of the mind" and we had not even become eligible to "present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice." Therefore any characteristics which we might have developed were part of our "old man" and, at best, suspect in automatically becoming a part of our "new man" given wholly to being led by the Holy Spirit. Should it somehow become clear that the Spirit wants us to exercise some of our previously developed characteristics in our new life, surely we should follow His leading.

Paul's whole premise for this part of his Roman letter is that, because of a continuing influence by Satan, we continue to sin even after we become new creatures in Christ. This continuance in sin prevents us from bearing fruit for God in our lives. The Holy Spirit indwelling the Christian will lead him away from the remaining vestiges of sin into a life that grows closer and closer to the perfection exhibited by Jesus. And while we cleave to the leading of the Holy Spirit, we will be enabled to be a holy vessel bearing fruit for God. This is possible not because of characteristics we have developed but because of the Holy Spirit's generation of new life within us.

The accomplishment of the work of Christ's Body on earth does not depend on how hard we Christians strive and exercise our own wills. Our striving may only hinder the work of Christ. The accomplishment of the goals of Christ's Body depends simply upon letting Christ work unrestrained and unrestricted. If Christ chooses to use an old characteristic of ours it will be renewed in us as a new gift made holy.