



‘We, though many, form one body’

Romans 12:1-8

For the Apostle Paul, theology is never an abstract subject detached from the day-to-day business of how we relate to other people in churches and the world. In a number of his epistles he writes at length about the many theological details and implications of the saving work which God has undertaken through Jesus, before then going on to unpack what this means in our daily lives. Romans is one such letter.

The first eleven chapters of Romans are regarded by many people as Paul’s *magnum opus*, his most lengthy and detailed exploration of the salvation available through Jesus and how it represents the climax of God’s purposes and the fulfilment of all the promises he has previously made to the Jewish people. As Paul memorably puts it in Romans 10:4: ‘Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.’

From the beginning of chapter 12, Paul explores how this great salvation, which is drawing in many Gentiles as well as offering redemption to Jews, is lived out by followers of Jesus. In verse 1, Paul urges the Roman Christians, ‘in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.’ The phrase ‘true and proper’ is the NIV’s translation of what is only one word in the original Greek, *logike*, from which we get our word logical. Giving our whole lives in sacrifice to God is the logical response to what God has done for us.’

In the following verses Paul goes explores how this sacrificial worship is lived out within the community. Before going on to use the same image of the body we read about in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul encourages the Romans to ‘not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you’ (12:3). This verse seems to imply a need for each member of the church to have genuine self-awareness when they are discerning how best to use their gifts. If we approach our service from the perspective of God’s grace to us as well as an honesty about our strengths and weaknesses we will serve well and for the right reasons. The alternative, a church where people are motivated by ego or a need to be taken seriously by others, will be a recipe for disaster. One reason for thinking about yourself with sober judgement will be an awareness that the gifts you have come not from you, but from God. And this will also take you to the point of having more of an appreciation of the gifts and abilities of others.’

In the final verses of this reading Paul provides examples of the gifts given by God to different members of the church. The list provided here overlaps with but is not the same as similar ones which we find in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. The point

he makes about each of these gifts is that they need to be exercised by each member with as much energy and grace as possible. Servers must serve, encouragers must encourage, givers must give as best they can.

1. If we read this passage quickly, it's easy to miss the significance of its opening words: 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy...' How does our reading of the passage change when we read it in light of all of us being people who have received God's mercy?
2. In Romans 12:3, Paul encourages us to 'think of yourself with sober judgment,' making clear the need for self-awareness for anyone who wants to serve in a church? Can you think of a time when you saw someone exercising what clearly wasn't their gift? What was the impact and how could it have been avoided?
3. In spite of Paul's insistence, both in this passage and in 1 Corinthians 12, that we attach value to the gifts of all members, in most churches there is probably an unspoken ranking system whereby some gifts are thought of as more important than others. Why do you think this happens, and are there steps we can take to prevent such thinking taking hold in SBC?
4. Another way of reading this passage which you might find helpful is to look at each of the gifts Paul mentions here and consider the impact it would have on the church if they were not present. For example, what difference would you see in a church without prophesy? Or a church without encouragement? Or a church without mercy?
5. Sunday's sermon finished with a reference to a recent newspaper article by the journalist Dawn Foster, who writes about how one of the ways attending church has helped her is to make her spend time with types of people she otherwise wouldn't mix with.¹ Do we agree with the final point of the sermon, that part of following Jesus means an openness to what we can receive from different people as much as what we need from God?

¹ Those interested in reading the whole article can find it here:
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/may/05/how-rediscovering-my-faith-is-helping-me-cope-with-a-chaotic-world>