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Exegetical Paper
Leadership in Romans 12:8

“The one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” Romans 12:8

Good Pastor, Lousy Leader

Is it possible to be a good pastor and a lousy leader? Matt Woodley’s ministerial performance assessment from his staff-parish relations committee was not good. His rationale for the poor scores: “I’m trained in exegesis, hermeneutics, systematic theology, spiritual direction, and counseling” (Woodley [1999], ctlibrary.com). Woodley’s next comment was more telling: “My church administration skills are weak” (Woodley [1999], ctlibrary.com). Woodley’s crisis raises a few questions about leadership in the church. Is ministry as simple as “love Jesus and love people” (Woodley [1999], ctlibrary.com) or it is more? And if it is more how much more? Michael Root, a Lutheran theologian, contends that there is no detailed consensus among Lutherans on a doctrine of ministry (Root, 157). This problem is not unique to Lutherans.

Ministry leadership is essential; defining what that leadership looks like is hard. Perhaps Warren Bennis was right. The Distinguished Professor of Business Administration at the Marshall School at the University of Southern California, wrote, “To an extent, leadership is a lot like beauty: it’s hard to define, but you know it when you see it” (Bennis 1989, 1). The illusive nature of leadership was a point that was not lost on Rost who noted that sixty percent of the authors of leadership since 1910 failed to provide a definition as they treated the subject (Rost 1993, 7). Leadership is an illusive issue. Conflicting and missing definitions as well as old and new paradigms call for a greater sense of clarity about leadership in general and for a biblical paradigm of leadership in particular.

A biblical paradigm calls for a biblical perspective. For a Christian the essential question is always, “What does God say?” Nancy Pearcey has written, “There is a biblical perspective on everything—not just on spiritual matters” (Pearcey, 44). The Word of God provides insight on the subject of leadership, and the letter of Paul to the Romans is a great place to start. In this polemic Paul provides both clarity about the gospel of Jesus Christ and how to live in light of it. It is the “duty” portion of the letter that reveals the heart of God about leadership. Paul begins chapter 12 by discussing the relationship believers are to have toward one another in the church. It is a relationship built on exercising God-given gifts for mutual benefit. When one understands the spiritual gift of leadership one begins to understand leadership from a biblical perspective. A careful study of the text will be made with this in mind. The following questions will guide this study:

1. What does the Greek text reveal?
2. How is the text addressed in the English translations?
3. Do the subsequent passages assist in the interpretation?
4. What was Paul’s purpose in discussing leadership with the church at Rome and how is this referenced elsewhere in the New Testament?
5. How do the scholars view the subject?
6. What can we conclude from this?

1. What does the Greek text reveal?

Since the focus of this exegetical study is to understand the leadership gift and biblical leadership as a consequence, the exegetical focus will be limited to parsing the passage, examining contextual ramifications, considering the grammatical construction of the verse and examining the meaning of προϊστάμενος ἐν σπουδῇ.

Parsing Romans 12:8

Word	Lexicon	Grammar	Significant points
εἴτε	If too	Conjunction	
παρακαλῶν	to call to or for, to exhort, to encourage	Vrb, pres, act, part., masc, sing, nom.	
ἐν	In, on, at, by, with	Prep, dative	
παρακλήσει	A calling to one's aid, i.e. encouragement	Noun, fem, sing, dative	
μεταδιδούς	To give a share of	Vrb, pres, act, part, masc, sing, nom	Preposition μετα indicates sharing with (Vincent)
ἐν	In, on, at, by, with	Prep, dative	D. of cause, showing manner of work
ἀπλότητι	Singleness, hence simplicity, sincerity	Noun, fem, sing, dative	
προϊστάμενος	To put before, to set over, to rule, to preside	Vrb, pres, mid, part, masc, sing, nom.	Lit, <i>he that is placed in front; middle put oneself (responsibly) at the head, lead, direct, rule</i>
ἐν	In, on, at, by, with	Prep, dative	Of cause, manner of work
σπουδῇ	Haste, diligence	Noun, fem, sing, dative	"In haste" as in earnest
ἐλεῶν	To have pity or mercy on, to show mercy	Verb, pres, act, part, masc, sing, nom,	
ἐν	In, on, at, by, with	Prep, dative	Of cause, manner of work
ἰλαρότητι	Cheerfulness, gladness, graciousness	Noun, fem, sing, dative	From ἰλαρότης, Late word, only here in NT, from hilaros 2 Cor 9:7

Contextual Ramifications

Chapter 12 introduces the “duty” half of Paul’s letter to the Romans. This classic doctrine-duty division is also evident also in Ephesians, Galatians, Colossians, and the Thessalonians epistles, though none as clear as Romans and Ephesians (Sandy and Headlam, 351). In these practically oriented chapters Paul lays a strong foundation for the unity and harmony that should characterize the people of God. It is harmony that is made possible, in part,

as they exercise their God-given spiritual gifts in faith—and as a means to serve one another (Sandy and Headlam, 351, 355). One must understand this to interpret the passage properly and to build a biblical theology for ministry. Paul is not writing a treatise on leadership. He is writing about how to use God-given *spiritual* gifts to build up the church. In doing so Paul describes the nature of godly leadership and how godly leaders are to act.

Grammatical Construction

Understanding the construction of verse 8 as well as the verses that precede it is essential to this brief exegesis. Murray notes the syntactical coherence that comes from recognizing verse 6 as introducing a new sentence: “*Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them . . .*” Taking verse 6 as a new sentence necessitates supplying a verb in the middle of the verse. This is both a common practice in New Testament translation and permissible in this passage (Murray, 121). Robertson comments on this insertion, “Perhaps in each instance the verb is to be repeated from the participle like *didasket* \bar{o} , here (let him teach) or a general term *poieito* (let him do it) can be used for all of them as seems necessary before “with liberality” in verse 8 (*en haploteti*, in simplicity)” (Robertson, 404). More will be said about this when considering the English texts.

Paul uses the preposition $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ six times in verses 7-8. In at least three of the uses of $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ recorded in verse 8, the preposition is a dative of cause, denoting the manner in which the work is to be performed (Hodge, 392, Friberg, T., Friberg, 148). Givers should give generously. Leaders should govern diligently. Mercy should be show cheerfully. Paul’s construction does much to shed light on the way leaders are to use their position—in active service, not in self-seeking. Leadership from a biblical perspective is responsibility, not privilege; stewardship, not perks; it is zealous service, not cozy ease in a corner office.

Word Meaning

Zodhiates provides a thorough overview of προϊστάμενος. The word is a compound of *pro*, before or over, and *histemi*, to place, to stand. It is used transitively, to cause to stand before, to set over. In the New Testament, however, it is only used in the intransitive, meaning to stand before. As a classification of ruling verbs it is followed by a direct object in the genitive (Wallace). There are two primary uses of the word in the New Testament. The first is “to be over, to preside, or rule” (Romans 12:8; 1 Timothy 5:17). The second meaning, by implication, is to care for something, to be diligent, or to practice (Titus 3:8,14). A derivative is *prostatis*, leader, ruler, dictator (Zodhiates, G4291).

As to the meaning of the phrase προϊστάμενος ἐν σπουδῇ, Vincent contends that a special ecclesiastical office is not in Paul’s mind, but that the reference is to any position that involves supervision or administration by a superintendent (Vincent, *The Epistles of Paul* 158). Vincent cites Paul’s admonition to Titus in support of his argument. Believers are to “*devote themselves to good works.*” The two ideas of *presiding over* and *carrying on* or *practicing* somewhat run together in this word (Ibid, 158). To Paul, a leader is to be in front, responsibly preoccupied with something (Friberg, Friberg, and Miller 329). Vincent notes, “The attempts to resolve the meaning [of προϊστημι] into *practise* [a job or profession] are mostly suspicious. Of the four examples cited by Alford, two at least, Thucyd. Viii. 75, and Soph. *Elect.* 980, have clearly the sense of *taking the lead*. When Plutarch says of Aspasia . . . he means that she *superintended* an unseemly employment; she was *at the head* of an establishment (Vincent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 350-1). The word προϊστάμενος means, “one who is placed over, who presides or rules,” one who leads. It is used of rulers in general, of civil rulers and of ecclesiastical rulers. It is also used in Romans 16:2 for a *patron*, one who befriends others (Hodge, 392-3).

2. How is the text addressed in the English translations?

King James Version

Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

American Standard Version

or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting: he that giveth, let him do it with liberality; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.

New American Standard Bible

or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

New Revised Standard Version

the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

New International Version

if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

English Standard Version

the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Interestingly, the King James, the American Standard, and the New International Version all supply a verb appropriate to exercising the gift mentioned, assumingly for syntactical smoothness and readability. The others do not, opting for a stricter rendering of the passage. As to the participle, προϊστάμενος, it is translated either as “ruleth,” “leads,” or “leadership”; words which may or may not convey the force of the original. The prepositional phrases in the English Standard Version, “in his exhortation,” “in generosity,” “with zeal,” and “with cheerfulness” reflect well the force of the original, with the exception of the King James at one point and the New International Version at most points. The King James and New International Version translators’ use of the supplied verb slightly altered the force of the Greek text.

3. Do the subsequent passages assist in the interpretation?

The passages that precede and follow verse 8 locate the concept of leadership within the context of the grace of God, the glory of God, the people of God, and the life of God. Romans 12:1 is the transitional verse that moves the reader from the gracious work of God accomplished through the justification provided by Christ (chapters 1-11) to the application of that work in the life of the believing community. Romans 12:1-2 remind the reader that grace that was shown by God should result in glory given to God through sacrificial living. Paul moves the believer beyond himself to the larger community in Romans 12:4-5 with his body life metaphor and the discussion of spiritual gifts. Finally, the verses that follow Romans 12:8, keep the focus on the life to which God calls his people, which is expressed to both believers and unbelievers.

4. What was Paul's purpose in discussing this issue with the church at Rome and how is this referenced elsewhere in the New Testament?

The Purpose in Discussing This Issue

The purpose behind the discussion of Paul about the spiritual gift of leadership is perhaps best expressed in Romans 12:1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (ESV)

Paul wanted the people who were changed by the grace of God to live for the God who changed them. He urged them to think soberly (Romans 12:3) and to think, “other centered.” Such thinking is the opposite of the “do nothing” attitude that effectively places one's gifts on a shelf, not to be used but simply admired. The approach Paul advocates is investing the gifts God gives—including the leadership gift—for the purpose of meeting the needs of others in the body and thus bringing God glory.

The Pauline Use of προΐστημι in the New Testament

The Pauline use of προΐστημι and its derivative, προστάτις is not extensive, but the use is significant enough to provide greater clarity for an understanding of the spiritual gift of leadership in particular and a picture of biblical leadership in general.

The use of προΐστημι in the Thessalonian Epistles

Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you **and are over you** (καὶ προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν) in the Lord and admonish you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12 ESV). The use of προΐστημι in this passage is identical to that of Romans 12:8, bearing a literal rendering of *who are placed before you*. Thayer notes that προΐστημι is used in the sense of “to be over, to superintend, preside over,” with a genitive of the person or thing over which one presides (Thayer, 539). Here the reference is to church leaders, apparently those who hold a recognized position within the body. The early date of this letter may support the view of Vincent that the word is used for ecclesiastical leaders in a loose sense (Vincent, Thessalonian Epistles, 48).

The use of προΐστημι in the Pastoral Epistles

Paul employs the use of προΐστημι in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, when addressing the qualifications for church officers. About elders he writes, “*He must manage his own household well* (τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου καλῶς προϊστάμενον), with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone *does not know how to manage his own household* (τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου προστῆναι οὐκ), how will he care for God’s church? Later in the chapter (1 Timothy 3:12), Paul addresses deacons, “Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, **managing their children and their own households well** (τέκνων καλῶς προϊστάμενοι καὶ τῶν ἰδίων οἴκων). As in 1 Thessalonians

5:12, the word carries the idea of superintending or presiding over something. In this case that “something” is the affairs of one’s home. In 1 Timothy 5:17, Paul describes the respect and remuneration due the elders who serve well, “Let *the elders who rule well* (Οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες πρεσβύτεροι) be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” In each of the pastoral instances, the use of προϊστημι indicates standing at the front and taking responsible oversight of an organization such as a home or church.

A slightly different use of προϊστημι occurs in Titus 3:8, 14, “The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to *devote* themselves to good works And let our people learn to *devote* themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. These things are excellent and profitable for people.” As has been mentioned, the idea here by implication is to care for something, to be diligent, or to practice (Titus 3:8,14).

The use of προστάτις in Romans

προστάτις is a derivative of προϊστημι (Zodhiates, G4368). The word refers to a leader, ruler, or director. It was also used by Plutarch for patrons, those in Athens who took care of strangers. The use of προστάτις in reference to Phoebe in Romans 16:2 appears to be as that of a patroness or helper, one who befriended strangers (Zodhiates, electronic 4368; Hodge, 393).

In summary, Paul uses the verb in both a general sense of a household superintendent, 1 Timothy 3:4, 5, 12; and of church authorities, 1 Timothy 5:17 (Vincent, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, 47). Paul only uses the word in a functional sense, however, not as “a title of specially appointed officers” (Vincent, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, 231).

5. How do the scholars view the subject?

There are two issues regarding προϊστημι that will be given a brief overview from the perspective of the scholars. The first issue relates to the group addressed by Paul in Romans 12. Who are the προϊστημι to whom Paul refers? Are they patrons, the προστάτις of Romans 16? Are they a specific group of church rulers or elders? Or is Paul referencing anyone who exercises authority in the church? Hodge provides an excellent treatment of the issue (Hodge, 392-3). Hodge notes that while Paul could have patrons in view, and the context supports it to a degree, it is not likely. There is only slight foundation for this meaning in Scripture and the general use in the writings of Paul is that of *rulers*. It is also unlikely that Paul had the pastor or bishop of the church in mind in that the appearance of a restricted reference to a pastor in the midst of a list of general Christian duties is, in the words of Hodge, “incongruous” (Hodge, 393). The more natural interpretation is that of anyone who exercises authority or leadership in the church.

Related to the question of whom Paul is referencing in Romans 12:8, is this, does προϊστημι generally refer to a specific ecclesiastical class of leaders or is it a functional word employed for ecclesiastical purposes? Vincent argues for a functional use of the verb over a particular ecclesiastical use. He does so on the basis of the primitive nature of the church. If the church were a more homogeneous body throughout Christendom, προϊστημι would connote something more ecclesiastical in nature. As it is the use is “characteristic of the loose and unsettled ecclesiastical nomenclature of the apostolic age” (Vincent, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, 48-49, 231). The argument of Vincent seems to carry weight, especially in regard to the use of προϊστημι in the Thessalonian epistle, due to its early date. Regardless of those in view, one must remember that Paul writes, ὁ προϊστάμενος ἐν σπουδῇ. Robertson points out that diligence, σπουδῇ, reflects the earnestness and zeal with which every godly leader acts (Robertson, 404).

6. What can we conclude from this?

Proper interpretation contributes to proper application. The focus of this exegesis is a better understanding of the spiritual gift of leadership in particular and biblical leadership in general. This exegetical analysis of Romans 12:8 and related New Testament passages reveals the spiritual gift of leadership is a God-given gift to members of the body to stand at the front of a group or project and lead responsibly and zealously in order to serve the people of God.

This study has not only shed light on the spiritual gift of leadership, but also on biblical leadership in general. First, biblical leadership is the God-given responsibility to stand at the front, to govern, to take oversight, to lead. Standing at front means taking charge. *Leaders lead*—respectfully, humbly, and with a servant heart—but ***leaders lead!*** Second, the context of the leadership gift helps the leader to remember that leadership is ultimately a service. Leaders serve the body through their work—***leaders serve!*** Third, leaders are to be action oriented, responsibly preoccupied with the work God has given them. Biblical leadership is marked by a bias for action—***leaders work!*** Fourth, biblical leadership is predicated on the idea of *managing* something; taking responsibility for a family, a group, a task, or a church. Biblical leadership does not focus on rights, but on responsibilities; not on perks, but on the task and the people entrusted to it—***leaders take responsibility!*** Fifth, leadership recognizes ultimate accountable to God—***leaders are accountable!*** Sixth, biblical leadership, responding to God’s call and aware of a bigger purpose are diligent in their efforts—***leaders are zealous!*** Seventh, biblical leadership recognizes that hard work, loving service and careful teaching is to be rewarded—***leaders deserves respect!*** Understanding the spiritual gift of leadership helps to ensure effective ministry and provides a theological footing for a more broad-based biblical paradigm of leadership for the church.

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—, Romans 12:8 —. Context Crossref Comment Greek. Verse (Click for Chapter). A New American Standard Bible or the one who exhorts, in the work of exhortation; the one who gives, with generosity; the one who is in leadership, with diligence; the one who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. NASB 1995 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. CHAPTER 12 Sacrifice of Body and Mind. 1* I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. a 2Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. * [12:1–13:14] Since Christ marks the termination of the Mosaic law as the primary source of guidance for God’s people (Rom 10:4), the apostle explains how Christians can function, in the light of the gift of justification through faith, in their relation to one another and the state. * [12:1–8] The Mosaic code included elaborate directions on sacrifices and other cultic observances. As leaders you have not needed anyone to hold your hand and watch over your shoulder; you take the initiative and think for yourselves. Most of the programs and ministries of this church have come as a result of one of you seeing a need and then taking the initiative in order to see that need was met. Your gifted leadership is inspiring and encouraging others to do something they have been feeling nudged by God to do. So today, I want you to understand the importance of leadership and pray that God will give you the gift of leadership. Understand that I am not talking about becoming the head of some committee. Far from it. Romans 12:8 — English Standard Version (ESV). 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:8 — King James Version (KJV 1900). 8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:8 — New Living Translation (NLT). If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. Romans 12:8 — New Century Version (NCV). 8 Whoever has the gift of encouraging others should encourage.