

‘STANDARD OF FAITH’ OR ‘MEASURE OF A TRUSTEESHIP’?
A STUDY IN ROMANS 12.3—A RESPONSE

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John Goodrich has recently published an article regarding the interpretation of μέτρον πίστεως in Rom. 12.3 in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*.¹ We have tried to respond to his article in that journal, but regrettably, the journal does not publish responses to articles, although we think that Goodrich’s article warrants a response. Goodrich argued ‘that μέτρον πίστεως in Rom 12:3 refers to the believer’s charism, addressed shortly and explicitly thereafter in 12:6’ (p. 753). Against the typical view that takes μέτρον πίστεως as ‘standard/measure of faith’, he proposes that this charism should be seen as ‘a trusteeship’ God grants to each believer. Specifically, the genitive construction in μέτρον πίστεως, regarded as appositive, is ‘a measure, namely a trusteeship’ (pp. 769, 772). This old alternative that Goodrich seeks to revive, however, poses some significant problems that can be neither resolved nor sustained by the arguments and evidence he marshals in this article. We assess critically each of these in what follows, followed by our own interpretation of μέτρον πίστεως in Rom. 12.3. Before doing so, a quick word needs to be said regarding Goodrich’s use of the term ‘charism’ in his article.

The English term charism (or charisma) has often confused scholars in relating it to the Greek lexeme χάρισμα (gift).² Whereas the meaning

1. John Goodrich, ““Standard of Faith” or “Measure of a Trusteeship”?”, *CBQ* 74 (2012), pp. 753-72. We cite the pages of the article within the text.

2. For example, see E. Earle Ellis, ‘Spiritual Gifts in the Pauline Community’, *NTS* 20 (1974), pp. 128-44, esp. pp. 128, 130-31, who suggests that the interchangeable terms πνευματικά and χαρίσματα are ‘applied to charismatic persons with gifts of inspired speech’; John Koenig, *Charismata: God’s Gifts for God’s People* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1978), pp. 167-69, who suggests a ‘charismatic community’ in the early church, including the ‘charismatic Corinthian believers’. For a similar critique, see Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), esp. pp. 261-85; *idem*, ‘Modern

of the former English term is explicitly associated with some kind of divinely bestowed power or talent or charm,³ the lexical meaning of the latter Greek term is simply ‘gift’. As Max Turner rightly contends, ‘In Paul’s discourses the “giver” is always God, but that does not mean that he thinks the word χάρισμα itself carries the sense “divine gift” (far less that it carries the sense “events or expressions of divine grace”)’.⁴ The nature or type of gift that is being referred to in a particular New Testament passage is defined by its co-text or context.⁵ As such, it is not altogether clear in Goodrich’s article whether the author is referring to the English or Greek sense of the term.

In this article, Goodrich supports his proposal for trusteeship via four main arguments. First, he critiques the prevailing scholarly interpretation that takes μέτρον πίστεως as ‘standard of faith’, which, according to him, is indebted to C.E.B. Cranfield’s 1962 study of the phrase, and argues that Cranfield’s interpretation fails to consider the complex verbal, thematic and theological context of the passage (pp. 755-56). He further argues that there seems to be a harsh transition from Paul’s discussion

Linguistics and Word Study in the New Testament’, in Joel B. Green (ed.), *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 2010), pp. 198-209; *idem*, ‘Spiritual Gifts’, in Desmond T. Alexander *et al.* (eds.), *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 789-96.

3. The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (11th edn) defines charisma as either a (1) ‘compelling attractiveness or charm that can inspire devotion’ or (2) ‘divinely conferred power or talent’. Similarly, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (2012) defines charism as ‘an extraordinary power (as of healing) given a Christian by the Holy Spirit for the good of the church’.

4. Turner, ‘Modern Linguistics’, pp. 199-205, esp. 205. Cf. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; New York: United Bible Societies, 2nd edn, 1989), I, p. 568; II, p. 262.

5. For example, eternal life (Rom. 5.15, 16; 6.23), Israel’s covenantal benefits (Rom. 11.29), ministerial gift (2 Tim. 1.6), spiritual gift (1 Cor. 1.7), the ability to remain chaste (1 Cor. 7.7), and gracious favor (2 Cor. 1.11) all correspond to and translate the lexeme χάρισμα in their respective passages. For more details on how the co-text and context constrain and determine the meaning of χάρισμα, see Hughson T. Ong, ‘Reconsidering the Meaning and Translation of χάρισμα, πνευματικός and πνεῦμα with Special Reference to the Discourse Context of 1 Corinthians 12–14’, in Stanley E. Porter, Wally V. Cirafesi and Gregory P. Fewster (eds.), *Modeling Biblical Language: Studies in Theory and Practice* (Linguistic Biblical Studies; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

of personal faith (πίστις) in v. 3 to personal function (πρᾶξις) in v. 4, noting the presence of γάρ at the beginning of v. 4. Most importantly, he argues that to interpret μέτρον πίστεως as standard of faith fails to 'satisfy the context of the surprisingly similar and nearby phrase κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως in 12:6' (p. 756).

We, however, contend that Goodrich has not shown that he has actually dealt with both the immediate and theological contexts as he wishes to claim in his study. He limits his investigation to Rom. 12.3-8, 16 and thus ignores the theological context Paul discusses in 1.18–8.39 and chs. 9–11, the critical transitional text at 12.1-2, and the intervening text in 12.9-15, which probably belongs to the entire unit of 12.9-20. At 12.1 Paul shifts his focus from God's redemptive action for human sin (1.18–11.36) to human behavior as its consequential response (12.1–15.33).⁶ The command to present one's body as a sacrifice—prefaced by 'through the compassions of God', in which οἰκτιρισμός (compassion) belongs to the same semantic domain that indicates God's gracious provision for humanity—serves both as an important conclusion for the preceding chapters (1.18–11.36) and an introductory theme for the subsequent verses.⁷ Paul invokes this sacrifice imagery based upon the Old Testament sacrificial system, as well as upon Christ's own sacrifice (cf. 4.25; 5.10, 12)—God's unique provision of salvation for humanity. Moreover, the concluding doxology in 11.35-36 suggests that salvation for both Jews and Gentiles is completely a gracious gift from God.⁸ 'Thus, Paul's ethical exhortation concerning right behavior is grounded

6. See Stanley E. Porter, *Romans* (Readings; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, forthcoming).

7. It is perhaps impossible and impractical for us to survey and cite all commentators on Romans here, but we suspect that virtually all commentators would share our opinion that 12.1-2 is pivotal in interpreting the verses that follow it. Among relatively recent commentaries, cf. Craig S. Keener, *Romans* (NCCS; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), p. 142; Leander E. Keck, *Romans* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), p. 289; Grant R. Osborne, *Romans* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 318. Cf. also Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 748; James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC, 38B; Dallas: Word, 1998), pp. 705, 708; Robert H. Mounce, *Romans* (NAC, 27; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), p. 230.

8. The lexical items παραδίδωμι (Rom. 11.35), χάρις (12.3), μερίζω (12.3), χάρισμα (12.6) and δίδωμι (12.6) can all be classed under the semantic field, 'Give' (Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, I, pp. 565-69).

in his theological position regarding the work of Christ,⁹ and therefore, any interpretation of the πίστις in 12.3 must be closely linked to this historical and theological context. Even though Goodrich, noting the γάρ at v. 4, asserts that there is a harsh transition from πίστις (v. 3) to πράξις (v. 4), he first needs to reckon with the γάρ at v. 3 preceding διὰ τῆς χάριτος τῆς δοθείσης μοι, which appears to be a parallel statement of intermediate agency, along with διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ in v. 1. These parallel (emphatic) phrases should indicate that the meaning of πίστις is governed by and related to God's gracious gift; trusteeship seems to be a meaning that is removed from this context.

In sum, Goodrich's reading of πίστις as trusteeship may sound appealing and practical in our present day ecclesial context but perhaps does not sound so in the context of Romans. In fact, Rom. 12.3-21 should probably be seen as one entire unit as Paul discusses membership in the body of Christ, with the first set of exhortations addressing how Christians ought to think of themselves in relation to their God-given gifts that are to be performed within the Christian community (12.3-8), and the second set listing over twenty different statements that deal with widespread rules concerning Christian behavioral standards toward both Christians and non-Christians (12.9-21), both of which are anchored in the transitional text and introductory injunction at 12.1-2.¹⁰ The phrase κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως at 12.6, though nearby, may not necessarily be related to the μέτρον πίστεως at 12.3 at all. One reason is that v. 6 commences with the first δέ in ch. 12, which may signal a shift of topic, especially after Paul's explication of the importance of unity using the human body metaphor.¹¹ Another reason is that, on syntactical grounds, κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως should perhaps be seen as

9. Porter, *Romans*, in loc.

10. See Porter, *Romans*, in loc.

11. Some scholars who have studied the functions of Greek conjunctions observe that the presence of the conjunction δέ not only signals the 'next step' in the writer's or the speaker's progressive thought, but also introduces a sentence cue informing the audience that there is some sort of disjunction at this particular point in the discourse. See Stephanie L. Black, *Sentence Conjunctions in the Gospel of Matthew: καί, δέ, τότε, γάρ, οὖν and Asyndeton in Narrative Discourse* (JSNTSup, 216; SNTG, 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), esp. pp. 142-78, and specifically p. 144; Kathleen Callow, 'The Disappearing δέ in 1 Corinthians', in David Alan Black, Katherine Barnwell and Stephen Levinsohn (eds.), *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), pp. 183-93 (185).

a prepositional phrase that defines or constrains not the phrase *διάφορα χαρίσματα* ('differing gifts', which is defined by *κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν*), but the meaning of *προφητεία*, which may imply that there are various qualities or types of prophecies.¹²

Secondly, Goodrich provides a brief study of the Pauline uses of (1) *μερίζω*, where he argues that 'when the verb does not describe internal division...it refers to the individual distribution of some personal assignment'; (2) the dative *ἐκάστῳ*, which he says 'is often applied elsewhere in Pauline literature when discussing the allocation of distinct ministry roles and functions'; and (3) *μέτρον*, where he argues that the use of the term in 2 Cor. 10.13 makes it clear that *μέτρον πίστεως* refers to a trusteeship in Rom. 12.3, since *μέτρον* functions as the direct object of *μερίζω* in both these passages (pp. 758-59). Thus, he deduces from this study that *μέτρον πίστεως* is a reference to individually allocated ministries.

There is perhaps nothing much that can or need be said here, except to point out the obvious fact that the meaning of *μέτρον πίστεως* cannot be determined through the meaning of usage of *μερίζω* and *ἐκάστῳ* in various Pauline texts, especially since these words are a verb and an adjective, which would require, respectively, nouns that serve as the verb's subject and object and a noun to be modified by the adjective. In other words, these terms in and of themselves have little or no meaning without a linguistic and literary context. Furthermore, the non-ministry related usage of the dative *ἐκάστῳ*, as well as the two different senses (to divide; to distribute) in the meaning of the verb *μερίζω* that Goodrich acknowledges, strongly suggests that context is the determining factor in interpreting and translating the meaning of a word.¹³ Similarly, there is no good reason to say that, because *μερίζω* takes *μέτρον* as its direct object (Rom. 12.3; 2 Cor. 10.13), 'the discreteness of one's *μέτρον πίστεως* in Rom. 12.3 becomes most apparent' (p. 759). Goodrich himself claims, citing Debbie Hunn, 'Context helps more in correctly defining the particular use of a term [i.e., *πίστις* in Paul's letters] than general statistics' (p. 768). Moreover, we think that the choice of particular words or phrases is dictated by the concept in the author's mind and the subject matter he wishes to talk about, such that,

12. Porter, *Romans*, *in loc.*

13. Cf. William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3rd edn, 2000), pp. 631-32; Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, II, p. 160, which provides four senses of meaning to *μερίζω*: divide; distribute; give or take part; and deal out, apportion, assign (responsibility).

even though words may appear in texts with their usual collocates, it does not follow (in our case) that πίστις at 12.3 refers to ‘Christian ministry distributed discretely to each’ (p. 758). As noted above, the meaning of πίστις here should be strictly constrained by the theological context of Paul’s discussion up to this point in his letter to the Romans.

Thirdly, Goodrich identifies and provides literary evidence (esp. Dio Chrysostom’s Περὶ πίστεως) for the various uses of πίστις in Greco-Roman society that suggest the meaning of a trusteeship. He points out that πίστις as trusteeship in many ancient texts refers to both public and private managerial positions. He argues that, since πίστις (along with πιστεύω) refers to trusteeships common in Greco-Roman society, it follows that trusteeships often involved great cost and responsibility for leaders and functionaries alike, of which Paul is one example, since he refers to his own charism and apostleship on occasions. Noting that some scholars have challenged this view, as this particular meaning of πίστις is not found elsewhere in Paul or in the rest of the New Testament, Goodrich concludes that trusteeship, in light of these Greco-Roman examples, ‘seems to be well within Paul’s semantic range’ (p. 768).

In our opinion, however, while πίστις (and πιστεύω) in these ancient texts may have been used for trusteeship, there are also many instances when it is *not* used for trusteeship. A clear example is the New Testament or the Pauline corpus that Goodrich himself has noted. One wonders, and consequently one has to adequately show, why Paul would have used πίστις in Rom. 12.3 instead of οἰκονομία (stewardship; 1 Cor. 9.17; Eph. 3.2; Col. 1.25) or οἰκονόμος (steward; Rom. 16.23; 1 Cor. 4.1, 2; Gal. 4.2; Tit. 1.7; 1 Pet. 4.10), if he indeed was referring to trusteeship—words used elsewhere for this concept (see esp. 1 Pet. 4.10). It is also not altogether clear in Romans 12 whether the community in view, where these gifts are to be exercised, is the Christian community or the larger society. Thus, that the charisms (or more accurately, χαρίσματα) in Rom. 12.6-8 are ministry roles and not God’s gifts seems unlikely. Ministry roles appear to be strictly confined to the Christian community.

Fourthly and last, before closing with the significant implications of a ‘trusteeship’ reading of Rom. 12.3 for Paul’s theology of ministry, Goodrich points out that the passage is mainly concerned not with ecclesial service, but with unity through humility and the proper exercise of one’s allocated trusteeship. He subsequently concludes that πίστις in 12.3 corresponds to the χαρίσματα in 12.6 as signaled by an *inclusio* formed by their respective modifiers ἕκαστος (v. 3) and διάφορα (v. 6).

It is difficult to grasp the author’s interpretation of μέτρον πίστεως

in this section. On the one hand, if trusteeship refers to the proper exercise of one's allocated responsibility in the body of Christ, then it follows from his argument that the passage is also *mainly* concerned with ecclesial service, especially when Goodrich follows Kenneth Berding's contention that 'the use of the term χάρισμα, along with the manner in which Paul refers to such gifts, suggests that they are in fact Spirit-given functions, roles, or ministries' (p. 772).¹⁴ On the other hand, if this passage is concerned with the unity of the body of Christ, Goodrich still needs to show that Paul was actually dealing with a disintegrating community in Rome. Such a situation seems to be clear in two of his other letters, Philippians and 1 Corinthians, but not in Romans. He further needs to show that Paul is not dealing with merely exhorting the Romans to behave properly based upon his own life experiences and observations with reference to salvation, which seems to be the major theme of his letter to the Romans. That πίστις in 12.3 corresponds to the χάρισμα in 12.6 as signaled by an *inclusio* formed by ἕκαστος (v. 3) and διάφορα (v. 6) is incorrect based on what we have so far argued.

In conclusion, we think that the clause with μέτρον πίστεως in Rom. 12.3 should be interpreted and translated as 'to each God allocates his measure of faith'.¹⁵ With emphasis on the individual, the result of one's theological salvation (1.18–8.39) and spiritual transformation (12.1-2) is the inclination to think of oneself soberly and accurately according to the measure of faith God grants him or her. Otherwise, without such measure of faith granted by God, one will be inclined to think of oneself beyond what is required by God. The exercise of these gifts (12.6-8), and the proper behavior towards Christians and outsiders (12.9-21), are all grounded firmly upon this μέτρον πίστεως that God grants and allocates, which, in turn, is the consequence of God's gracious gift of salvation.

14. See Ong, 'Reconsidering', who argues, against Berding's view, that the different historical contexts and audiences of Rom. 12.6-8, 1 Corinthians 12–14, Eph. 4.11, and 1 Pet. 4.10-11 should discourage us from seeing these texts as actually theologically related through the concept of spiritual gifts or ministries. Whether Paul or Peter is indeed talking about ministerial roles or spiritual gifts in these passages is unclear. In 1 Corinthians 12–14, Paul was addressing the third and final problem (tongues) among abuses in the Corinthian worship gatherings. Here in Romans 12 he seems to be talking about membership in the body of Christ following one's salvation, justification and reconciliation to God. For Berding's view, see Kenneth Berding, *What Are Spiritual Gifts? Rethinking the Conventional View* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), pp. 32-35; *idem*, 'Confusing Word and Concept in "Spiritual Gifts": Have We Forgotten James Barr's Exhortations?' *JETS* 43 (2000), pp. 37-51, esp. 39.

15. See Porter, *Romans*, *in loc.*