

The Gifted Church

Romans 12:6-8

In the first five verses of our study of Romans 12, we have learned that our proper response to the mercies of God in salvation is to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God as a service of worship. Remember that all of the practical exhortations that we have in Romans 12 flow out of God's mercy. So it's important that we don't treat this chapter as rules for earning God's favor, but as the fruit of enjoying God's mercy. The first 11 chapters of Romans taught us that God gives His grace freely. You can't earn it. You can only receive it by faith or reject it in unbelief. So that those of us who have received the grace and mercy of salvation in Christ Jesus and treasure Him above all, will not be conformed to this world but transformed in the renewal of your mind. All of life will change.

God's good, acceptable and perfect will for our lives is for our minds to be constantly renewed through our study, meditation, and prayer over the Word of God found in the Bible. We are to do this humbly and faithfully within a community of believers, the local church, the body of Christ. So in verses 6-8 Paul will show us how the church, the body of Christ, functions through members who use their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the body.

A generation ago, the subject of spiritual gifts took center stage in many conferences and church gatherings. There were times that it appeared spiritual gifts drove the engine of the church rather than Christ and the gospel. So, it is important that we have a balanced biblical understanding of spiritual gifts. First, let's read our text for today, then I want to give a quick overview of the subject of gifts, and then we will examine briefly the gifts mentioned in Romans 12.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;

7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;

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

1. What is a spiritual gift?

Paul starts verse 6, "**Having then gifts ...**"

A. Gifts are a grace from God.

The word translated "gifts" is the Greek word *charismata*. It literally means "according to grace," or "grace gift." Biblically, the term charismatic does not just apply to one group of Christians that emphasize certain gifts like speaking in tongues. It applies to all believers. We are all grace-endowed, grace-gifted Christians.

Just as the Lord measures out faith to each of us in verse 3, the Lord gives these gifts "**according to the grace that is given to us.**" I point out two lessons from this phrase:

(1) None of us can boast about our spiritual gift since it is given by God's grace. You did not earn it or merit it in any way. Just as your salvation is by grace, your gifting is by grace. So rather than bragging about our gifts, we thank God. We

glorify the Lord for His gifts. If you teach, then glorify the Lord for that ability; if you serve, glorify the Lord who enabled you to serve; if you show mercy, glorify the Lord for giving you such a needed gift. The gift is not a reward but a gift given out of abundant grace.

(2) Each must learn to depend on the measure of grace and supply of faith God has entrusted to him for exercising his gifts. Gifts are not just our natural talents and abilities. There is a difference between having the talent or ability to teach and teaching through the enabling and empowering of the Holy Spirit. How can you tell when you are not depending on God's grace? You will be proud of yourself or find occasion for self-boasting or self-promotion instead of exercising your gift humbly in God-dependence.

B. Gifts are spiritual (1 Cor. 12)

In 1 Corinthians where Paul teaches in more detail about the body of Christ and gifts he uses the term *pneumatikos*, which means spiritual or "of the Spirit." So from that passage we get our term "spiritual gifts." Paul writes, **"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit [of all]"** (1 Corinthians 12:7). And, **"But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills."** (1 Corinthians 12:11).

So these gifts of God's grace are given by the Lord through His Holy Spirit. We do not decide what gifts we have or want, God distributes them as He wills. Spiritual gifts are the gracious enabling or ability given to every believer by the Holy Spirit for service in the church. Verse 6 goes on to say we have **"gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us."** Each of us have different gifts.

2. Who has spiritual gifts?

A. Each member is gifted.

Paul implies that all the members of the body of Christ, every believer in the church, has a gift or gifts. In verses 4-5 he had just used the analogy of the church as the body of Christ to show that we are one body in Christ, made up of various members, each with an important function. Now he shows in verse 6 that the way we function is through the gifts that God graciously gives to each member.

Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 4:10, **"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."** (Ephesians 4:7 NKJV) **"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."**

Spiritual gifts are not just for super Christians or more spiritual people, God gives them to each child of God by His Spirit just as He wills.

The point is that gifts are like the various parts of the body. We are able to do all normal physical activities with what God has given to us physically. If someone cannot walk or cannot see or cannot hear, then we recognize a physical impairment that keeps him from performing the normal functions of the human body. In the same way, all that is normal for the church to do—teach, disciple, serve, witness, missions, giving, ministry—God has enabled through gifts in the body of Christ. If these things are not getting done, we have to consider whether the church is experiencing impairment. Could you be impairing the church by neglecting your spiritual gift? We

cannot accomplish all that God intends for our church until all the members of the body are functioning properly using the gifts God has given.

C. Each member is gifted differently.

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.”

God has created diversity in the church by giving different gifts in every local congregation as needed. Some in Corinth were arrogant because their gift seemed to be in more limelight than others. It created friction and disunity, which is the very opposite intention of spiritual gifts. So he wrote, **“4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.”** (1 Cor 12:4-6).

Notice the three differences mentioned: different gifts, different ministries, and different activities. *Gifts* focus on how the individual who has been endowed by the Lord. *Ministries* identify the ways that the gifts are expressed through a variety of means in partnership with others in the body. *Activities* call attention to the multiplied ways that the exercise of spiritual gifts serves the broad needs in the body of Christ.

So one with a teaching gift might serve as a Sunday School teacher and build up others' understanding of the Word. Another with this gift might disciple a new believer one-on-one. Another might teach the Bible in his preaching ministry. Another with this gift might teach her children at home to love and serve the Lord. The same gift is exercised in different ways through different ministries and different activities.

3. What is the purpose of spiritual gifts?

The next phrase in verse 6 is not stated in the original text, but it is implied by the rest of the passage in verses 6-8, **“let us use them.”** What Paul says about the seven gifts he mentions shows us that the point of the whole passage is that we must exercise our gifts. If you have the gift of prophecy, then prophesy; if ministry, then minister; teaching, then teach; exhortation, then exhort; giving, give generously; leadership, then lead; showing mercy, do it with cheerfulness. In other words, do it. God gives us gifts so that we would use them as members of the body of Christ in His church.

(1 Corinthians 12:7) **“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit [of all].”** Gifts are used to benefit the church. In Ephesians 4 where Paul also talks about gifts he concludes by saying, that **“the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”** As each member uses their spiritual gifts, the church grows and we build each other up in love.

As grace gifts, each spiritual endowment has a spiritual purpose. They may be exercised in the most mundane ways but they serve a spiritual purpose. One might have a gift of service, using it in preparing meals for a family laid-low by sickness. Preparing the food, delivering it, and then checking on the welfare of the sick family may appear mundane but a spiritual ministry has taken place. The one on the receiving end is lifted up and encouraged by such kindness, and in all likelihood, spurred on to pursue more faithfulness as a Christian.

The purpose of our gifts is to use them to build up the body of Christ as each member does his or her part.

4. What gifts are there?

How many spiritual gifts are there? We find seven listed here. Is that all? Paul lists ten more in two passages in 1 Corinthians 12 (8-10; 28-30). Peter puts gifts in two categories, speaking and serving (1 Pet 4:11). Paul also refers to gifts to the church in Ephesians 4:11, adding two new ones to the other lists. What does this tell us?

Paul did not offer an exhaustive list of gifts in either Romans or 1 Corinthians. Instead, these are examples of the gifts bestowed by the Spirit on believers. I agree with Jim Boice, "Nineteen gifts are mentioned in these five lists, but the number is not absolute...there are probably gifts that could be mentioned but are not" [Romans: The New Humanity, vol. 4:1583]. Which tells me that the main thing is not flagging a particular gift for bragging rights but serving the Lord in the ways He has gifted and enabled you, whether you can pin down a title to the way you serve or not. That's something of the emphasis in these verses. Whatever gifts are given then "exercise them accordingly." Don't just stare at it but use it!

We will take a look at the gifts identified in Romans 12 just to help us think about how the Lord bestows them.

Examples of gifts:

- **prophecy, "if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith."** This gift is the ability to speak authoritative truth from God. In the first century, it probably referred to receiving direct messages from the Holy Spirit and especially to the apostles who wrote the scriptures. John MacArthur makes a good case from 1 Corinthians 14 why he believes this gift is exercised today as preaching God's word. It refers to those people who can take the Word of God and make it shine. Prophecy must be exercised in proportion to our faith and in line with the faith once for all delivered to the saints in the Word of God.
- **Ministry or Serving, "or ministry, let us use it in our ministering."** This is a general term that means to "wait on tables." People with this gift prefer to work behind the scenes. They don't seek the limelight and they don't want to be rewarded for their work. They quietly go about their business, finding ways to help others. Service is broad. It may be service to individuals: taking meals, cleaning someone's home, taking care of someone's children, helping in emergencies. It may be to the church: taking care of the church lawn or building, doing repairs so that the body might assemble without distraction, helping with the finances, setting up classes for teaching times, working in the preschool/nursery area, working with audio needs, helping with the worship and music.
- **Teaching, "he who teaches, in teaching."** This is one of the most needed spiritual gifts, widely distributed in the body of Christ. Teachers have the ability to take the Word of God, explain it clearly, and apply it to the lives of the hearers. This gift may be exercised in many venues—on Sunday morning, in a small group, or in one-on-one discussion.
- **Exhortation, "he who exhorts, in exhortation."** Those who exhort are **encouragers** who help other who are struggling to stay in the race. We find

exhortation—literally, one called alongside—in a variety of places: pulpit, platform, writing, counseling, consolation, befriending the lonely, encouraging those who have lost heart. Barnabas is a great example in the New Testament. Thank God for the encouragers who put courage into us when we felt all hope was gone.

- **Giving, “He who gives, with liberality.”** This may be someone who distributes mission or benevolence funds for the corporate body. Or it may be the individual whom God has given the ability to give in large measure. He may not be wealthy; but his generosity or “liberality,” fills the gap in the church’s needs, and likely spurs on others to give more liberally. The word actually means “single-mindedly”—referring to the fact that they should give “as unto the Lord”—not for any earthly reward.
- **Leadership, “he who leads, with diligence.”** The word means “to stand in front of a group.” This gift enables a person to take charge of a group or a meeting and lead that group in a positive, productive direction. People with this gift should do their work eagerly, gladly, with energy and full commitment.
- **Showing mercy, “he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”** This gift enables the believer to reach out to others who are hurting with the love of Christ. In What a crucial ministry this is. The challenge for mercy-givers is to do their work “cheerfully.” The word means “with a smile on your face.” One translation puts it this way: “If you come with sympathy to sorrow, bring God’s sunshine on your face.”

Conclusion

Five practical suggestions may help you identify and exercise your spiritual gift.

- (1) Offer yourself to God as a living sacrifice, out of gratitude for His mercies to you. Give yourself to serve Him sacrificially, selflessly, through serving others. This is the starting place Paul specifies in Romans 12:1-2. It should also be our starting place.
- (2) Study the Scriptures, renewing your mind. Scripture will not only name some spiritual gifts, but also describe their function and give examples.
- (3) Be in the church. You cannot know and use your gift in isolation. That is the whole point of verses 4-5, **“so we, [being] many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”**
- (4) Be obedient to the commands of Scripture. All Christians are commanded to serve, to give, to encourage, to show mercy. As you begin to obey, take note of those things in which God’s blessing is confirmed by others and becomes clear to you.
- (5) Look for needs, and seek to meet them. Spiritual gifts are given in order to meet the needs of others. Others needs are all about us. What needs are going unmet in the church?

Finally, what matters to God is not merely that we know our gifts or that we use our gifts, but how we use them—the spirit, the attitude. What matters is not merely that we give and lead and show mercy. What matters to God is free and lavish generosity in our giving. What matters to God is passion and eagerness and zeal in our leadership. What matters to God is gladness and cheerfulness and joy in our mercy. That’s why in the

middle of Paul's instructions on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians the center chapter is all about love. And the next two verses here in Romans 12 are about love. Nothing you do for Christ matters if His love is not flowing through you to others.

Romans 5:5 says, **"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."** The love that is necessary to use our gifts comes from the Holy Spirit of God who lives in the children of God. And the only way to become a child of God is to believe on Jesus Christ. This is the first gift of God, salvation through Jesus Christ. He paid the death penalty for your sin so that you could be born again as a child of God and be given the gift of eternal life through His resurrection from the dead.

Believe on Jesus now.