

The Proper Use Of Spiritual Gifts

(Romans 12:3-8)

Story: Three Christians with different gifts:

During the French Revolution, there were three Christians who were sentenced to die by the guillotine. One Christian had the gift of faith, the other had the gift of prophecy, the other had the gift of helps.

The Christian with the gift of faith was to be executed first. He was asked if he wanted to wear a hood over his head. He declined and said he was not afraid to die. "I have faith that God will deliver me!" he shouted bravely. His head was positioned under the guillotine, with his neck on the chopping block. He said a short prayer and waited confidently. The rope was pulled, but nothing happened. His executioners were amazed and, believing that this must have been an act of God, they freed the man.

The Christian with the gift of prophecy was next. His head was positioned under the guillotine blade, and he too was asked if he wanted the hood.

"No," he said calmly, "I am not afraid to die, and what-is-more, I predict that God will deliver me from this guillotine!" At that, the executioner pulled the rope and again, nothing happened. Once, again the puzzled executioner assumed this must be a miracle of God, and the man was freed.

The third Christian, with the gift of helps, was next. He was brought to the guillotine and likewise asked if he wanted to wear a hood.

"No," he said, "I'm just as brave as those other two guys." The executioner then positioned him face up under the guillotine and was about to pull the rope when the man shouted, "Hey wait a minute!" I found the problem with your guillotine!"

We laugh at this story, and so we should. However, the subject of spiritual gifts is no laughing matter. In Romans 12, verses 1-2, Paul calls on every believer to offer or present their body to God as a living sacrifice, which is our spiritual service of worship. Part of our yielding ourselves to God includes the use of spiritual gifts. Paul continues in verses 3-8 by discussing various spiritual gifts that God has given to every one of us to carry out His work through us. In other words, true worship results in service to God, and to one another through our spiritual gifts.

In the section before us this morning, Romans 12:3-8, Paul discusses three principles governing the proper use of spiritual gifts. This is actually a condensation of a much lengthier discussion on spiritual gifts recorded in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, written by Paul less than a year earlier. This discussion here in Romans 12 is often referred to as the Reader's Digest version. In any event, look with me this morning at three principles governing the proper use of spiritual gifts. Paul begins in verse 3 with an appeal for every believer to approach this subject of spiritual gifts with humility.

I. An Appeal For Humility (v. 3)

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.

Paul appeals to his readers based on the gift of his own apostleship, which he reiterates was a gift of God's grace—*“the grace given to me.”* Having spent several years ministering in the Church at Corinth, from which he wrote this letter, Paul knew full-well the devastating consequences of spiritual pride. He exhorts every man and woman among them not to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment. Every believer is admonished not to entertain an inflated view of their own importance. Instead, as recipients of God's mercy and grace, we should model the humility of Christ, which places the rights and welfare of others above our own. We must continually remind ourselves of this simple truth: that my salvation and my gifts are all a work of God's grace. I don't deserve it; I didn't produce it; it is all of grace.” We are saved by grace; we grow by grace; and we serve solely by grace. We must never get to thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought too.

Tom Brokaw recalls his own humbling experience: he was wandering through Bloomingdales' New York store one day, shortly after earning a promotion to the co-host spot on the *Today Show*. Brokaw's new position was another peak in a rapidly rising career in TV journalism after plodding faithfully up the ranks, first in Omaha, then for NBC in Los Angeles and Washington D. C. It wouldn't be lying to say he was feeling pretty darn good about himself. As he browsed through the store, he noticed a man watching him intensely. The man continued to stare, and finally, when the man approached him, Brokaw prepared himself to reap the first fruits of television stardom in New York. The man walked up to him and asked, “Tom Brokaw, right?” “Yes,” said Brokaw. “You

used to do the morning news on KMTV in Omaha, right?” “That’s right,” said Brokaw, getting ready for the warm praises and adulation destined to follow. “I knew it the minute I spotted you,” the fellow said. Then he paused and said, “Whatever happened to you?” Brokaw recalls that that slice of humble pie is exactly what he needed.

As believers we need to avoid thinking too highly of ourselves, or God will have to humble us with a big slice of humble pie. All that we are, or ever will be, is a gift of God’s grace. We have nothing to boast about but Christ alone.

The second principle Paul appeals for is unity, vv. 4-5

II. An Appeal For Unity (vv. 4-5)

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.

Paul reminds his readers that as the physical body is comprised of many different members performing various functions, so also in Christ the many members form one body.

Three observations jump out from these verses:

(1) *Your body is made-up of many members.* The most visible and prominent spiritual gifts are not necessarily the most important gifts. Our most vital organs while not visible, they are extremely important. So too, the most vital members of the body of Christ may be the least visible, but they are important.

(2) *Every member of the body is important.* How important is it that each member does his or her part? It’s vitally important, because no two of us have exactly the same function. A non-serving saint is like an ear on the human body that decides it doesn’t want to hear anything today, or a hand that decides it has done too much and it’s going to take the day off. Let one of your ears or hands quit working, and your whole body suffers.

(3) *Every member of the body depends on the other members.* You may have never thought about how utterly crucial the local church is to your life in Christ. Do you realize that in belonging to the body, we belong to each other? Connection with Christ means connection with each other. We all need each other.

Several years ago, two students graduated from the Chicago-Kent College of Law. The highest ranking student in the class was a blind man named Overton and, when he received his honor, he insisted that half the credit should go to his friend, Kasprzyzak. They had met one another in school when the armless Mr. Kasprzyzak had guided the blind Mr. Overton down a flight of stairs. This acquaintance ripened into friendship and a beautiful example of interdependence. The blind man carried the books which the armless man read aloud in their common study, and thus the individual deficiency of each was compensated for by the other. After their graduation, they opened a law practice together.

The body of Christ is comprised of many members, all with a different purpose to fulfill. There is no room for prideful individualism, for we are all inter-dependent on one another as members of Christ's corporate body. The third principle governing spiritual gifts is an appeal for us to use our gifts to minister to one another in the body in vv. 6-8

III. An Appeal For Ministry In The Body (vv. 6-8)

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.

Every believer is responsible to use his or her spiritual gift in ministering to one another in the body of Christ. Paul says we all have different gifts. This implies that every believer has at least one spiritual gift. Some scholars are of the opinion that each believer possesses a cluster of gifts, which the Spirit gives at the moment of salvation, and develops and brings to fruition at different times in the believers life. Also, the gifts differ according to the grace given to us. All of God's gifts are according to His grace, as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 12:11, "distributed to each one individually just as He wills."

Paul mentioned seven different gifts here, and called on each believer to exercise their gift according to the measure of God's grace given to them. Again, this is not an exhaustive list of gifts, for if you put all the gifts named in the NT, you come up with around 20 gifts. Nonetheless, these seven gifts are a good representation of the gifts we may have in this local body. The major point of the passage however, is an exhortation for every believer to use their

spiritual gift to strengthen the unity of the body. Since we all have different spiritual gifts given by God to serve one another, Paul says, “Let’s use our God-given gifts to build up the body, which brings glory to God. He begins with the gift of prophecy, v. 6

1. Prophecy—“If we have the gift of prophecy, let’s use it, according to the proportion of his faith.”

Prophecy in the New Testament is the ability to proclaim a spontaneous and inspired word for God. Prophets are to exercise their gift in proportion to the faith, meaning according to the faith God has given them to use their gift. Prophets must use their prophetic gift to serve God and the church rather than to serve themselves. He is not to speak beyond what God has revealed. He must never speak on his own authority or from his own resources. Second, is the gift of serving or helps, v. 7a

2. Serving (v. 7a)

A person who serves provides practical help to meet the needs of others. The first deacons were appointed to serve the physical needs of widows in the church, so that the apostles could devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of God’s Word (Acts 6:1-7). The third gift is teaching, v. 7b

3. Teaching (v. 7b)

Teaching is the ability to understand, apply, and to communicate the truths of Scripture in a clear and relevant manner. Teachers are able to share what they have learned from their own study of God’s Word. People are able to understand God’s truth when you explain it to them. The light goes on, and they get the “Ah ha” factor. I hope and pray that my teaching encourages each of you to begin digging deeper into God’s Word for yourselves. As pastor, I am not the only teacher in this church. There are other faithful men and women who teach Sunday School and children’s church. They may never receive the accolades and the respect of the pastor, but they are strategic and significant members of this local church. If you have the gift of teaching, be sure and study to show yourself approved by God as a workman able to rightly divide God’s Word. In other words, set aside adequate time to study and prepare your lessons. The fourth gift is Exhortation, v. 8

4. Exhortation

Exhortation is to encourage, comfort, confront, and instruct others. Exhortation focuses upon the application of truth to everyday life. As noted last week, Paul used this verb *parakaleo* in 12:1 when he “urged [*parakaleo*] his brothers and sisters by the mercies of God, to present their bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.” The fifth gift is giving,

5. Giving

While every believer is responsible to give for the support of the church, this is a reference to certain individuals that give above and beyond to help meet the needs in the church. When this person contributes it is done in simplicity and with no ulterior motives. They give “as unto the Lord,” and not for any earthly recognition or reward. This type of giver is consciously investing in eternity. If you have the gift of giving, Paul says use it. Sixth is the gift of leadership,

6. Leadership

This word means literally “to stand before.” The person who stands before is usually the leader of the group. A pastor is considered a leader by default. Leadership refers to the ability to motivate, coordinate, and oversee others in ministry. The leader in God’s economy is first and foremost a servant. Jesus taught this principle in Mark 10:45—anyone desiring to be great, must follow His example of being a servant to all men. God’s leader gives of himself tirelessly in service to the body of Christ. Finally, number seven, showing mercy,

7. Mercy

Mercy is the ability to perceive people’s hurts and gently, lovingly, and cheerfully console them. Since our God is a merciful God (cf. 12:1) His people must be merciful too. To show mercy is to care for anybody who is in need or in distress (e.g., aliens, orphans and widows) or the disabled, the sick and the dying. Moreover, mercy is not to be shown reluctantly or patronizingly, but cheerfully. Instead of whining and griping about caring for those in need, the person with this gift will meet their need with a smile on their face, and joy in their heart. All of us can exhibit the gift of mercy to those in need.

A question I am always faced with is how does a believer discover their Spiritual gift or gifts? In my particular case, the Holy Spirit placed a calling on my life, and guided me to pursue Bible training. He equipped me with the basics, and then sent me back into the fishing industry to serve as an evangelist. I had the privilege of leading many tuna-fisherman and their family members to faith in Jesus Christ. After 30 years in the tuna fishing industry, the Lord directed me to Dallas Theological Seminary where He trained me to serve in the Body of Christ as a Pastor-Teacher.

Many believers discover their gifts along the road of life. A Bible study group met in a home to study how various ministries should work in the body of Christ. One member commented, "I don't understand how different gifts can work together."

At that moment a woman accidentally dropped her cup, which broke and spilled coffee all over the floor. Each member in the group responded differently to the mishap, according to their spiritual gifts.

The teacher gave some advice. "Next time if you will put your cup on the coffee table, that won't happen again."

The administrator responded by organizing a clean-up committee. "Bill, would you please find a mop. Sally, could you help him with a towel?"

Bill, who had the gift of service, hurried to get the mop.

Sally, who had the gift of helps, followed Bill and said, "I'll help you!"

The person with the gift of exhortation said, "We all make mistakes so don't let it get you down."

A woman with the gift of mercy put her arm around the woman, patted her hand and said, "I feel so badly for you."

Another man, with the gift of giving exclaimed, "I'll buy a new set of coffee mugs to replace the broken one!"

They all used their various gifts together to resolve the situation.

Conclusion: In closing permit me to say, every one of you has a spiritual gift to use for the good of this church, and for the glory of God. A failure to ask God to

help you discover and develop your spiritual gift will result in a life devoid of spiritual service and blessing. It reminds me of the great violinist, Nicolo Paganini, who upon his death willed his marvelous Cannone Guarnerius violin to Genoa—the city of his birth, where it is still housed in the Palazzo Tursi Museum—but only on condition that the instrument never be played upon. This was an unfortunate condition, for the violin was made from a very peculiar wood. As long as it is used and handled, it shows little wear, but as soon as it is discarded, it begins to decay. Paganini's exquisite, mellow-toned violin has become worm-eaten in its beautiful case, valueless except as a relic. The mold-ridden instrument is a reminder that a life withdrawn from all service to others loses its true meaning.

There are many in this church who are worthy of praise. It doesn't matter what area of ministry you are serving in, the Lord is pleased and so are we. If you don't know what your gift is ask God to show you and He will. May God help all of us to identify and begin using our Spiritual gift to serve this body, and God will be glorified. At his death, his violin was given to the city of Genoa,

As we all know, God's greatest gift of all is the gift of eternal life that He gives to us in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul wrote back in chapter 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." "He who has the Son has eternal life." Have you acknowledged your sin and come to believe that Jesus Christ died in your place and arose again triumphant over Satan, sin, and death? Jesus offers you eternal life this morning if you will place your faith/belief in Him. If you have never made the decision to trust Him as your own personal Savior, we urge you to invite Him to come into your life right now. Let's bow prayerfully in His gracious presence.

Closing song: PPT slides *In My Life Lord, Be Glorified* = *Horizon Praise Team*

The LORD bless you, and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine on you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance on you,
And give you peace.