

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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1/5/08

Romans 12:6-8 “What Is Your Spiritual Gift?”

Intro. One of the best selling books to hit store shelves is Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life*. One reason it was such a best seller is because it touches on a very important need we all have: a sense of significance and purpose. What is your purpose in life? Quite a few seem to think they have no higher purpose than to make themselves happy. I believe that God created us first for His own glory, and then to bless others. We have a role to fill to benefit our families, our church, our community, and at work or school.

Today we are going to talk about what role we can have in our church. In our last message from Romans, we began a study of the Church as the Body of Christ. Like a body, the church is made up of many individual members. The individual members of the Church should not carry out the same function with the church. Rather, we have different roles and responsibilities. And we also learned that God has supernaturally enabled each of us to carry out some aspect of the work of the church. Then, as one body in Christ, we are to work together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.

This morning we will learn more specifically about spiritual gifts, which are divine enablements for service. God has placed you in the body of Christ to serve others, and to build up the church. As members of the body of Christ, we depend on the interchange that occurs between us. That involves using our gifts to serve one another. In your affiliation with the church, your main concern should not be what your church can do for you, but what you can do for your church.

So I hope that you will desire to learn how you can be a blessing to your church and to others. The way you can be most effective is to learn about spiritual gifts. Some of you still need to discover your gift. So I will share with you most of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament. The list of gifts that Paul gives here is only a representative sampling of gifts. First Corinthians 12 adds the gifts of faith and discerning of spirits. Because the lists are somewhat different, we can conclude that they are not rigid, all-inclusive lists. They are but samples of the dimensions of ministry within the Body of Christ. I consider them to be general categories of giftedness in which there could be many different variations.

Others of you know what your spiritual gift is. You just need to use it, or discover how best to use your gift. I read about a man in Saskatchewan, Canada, who has a hobby of collecting rare violins. Unfortunately, many violins in his collection aren’t likely to be used. Wouldn’t it be marvelous if the great violinists of the world were able to play beautiful music on those violins? As it is, they are only on display.

Some churches are similar to that man’s collection of unused violins: They are a collection of gifted Christians, but none of them are making any music, so to speak. They’re merely on display. Let us not be that way. Let us use the gifts that God has given us.

Spiritual gifts fall into three categories in the New Testament: speaking gifts, serving gifts and sign gifts. The Apostle Peter is responsible for the designation of the first two (1 Peter 4:10-11). The sign gifts, such as tongues & gifts of healing, are not mentioned here or in any other list of spiritual gifts with the exception of 1 Cor. 12, which was an early epistle. I believe the sign gifts were unique to the time of the apostles as the church was being established.

According to 2 Cor. 12:12 & Hebrews 2:4, they authenticated the teaching of the apostles and the subsequent writing of the scripture.¹ So I am going to limit our discussion of spiritual gifts to the two main categories that are still relevant to the church today.

So first of all:

I. CONSIDER IF YOU HAVE ONE OF THE VERBAL GIFTS

Just because you have a natural ability to talk a lot does not mean that you have one of the verbal spiritual gifts. And just because you are quiet & reserved does not mean you do *not* have one of these gifts. I know of quite a few preachers who are quiet & reserved in their personalities, & yet very gifted at public speaking.

So what are the speaking gifts listed here? Heading the list is:

A. Prophecy – This gift is mentioned in the last of v.6. It refers to the function of communicating revelations of truth from God. The prophet is God’s spokesman. Even in the Old Testament, while prophets foretold the future, their major role was to tell forth God’s message to their own generation. In the New Testament era those with this gift received new revelation directly from the Spirit of God. Their role was especially important because the Bible was not yet completed, and the people often needed to hear a new word from God. In Ephesians 2:20 Paul said the Church as been “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” They were the ones who had the unique task of delivering God’s Word to the Church.

In our day, this gift is different. That’s because all of God’s Word that we need has been written down & preserved for us in the Bible. The prophet of today is able to take God’s Word that has already been revealed, and proclaim just the right message from God that is needed. They are gifted at applying God’s Word to current situations & needs. Furthermore, the modern day prophet expounds God’s Word, and then calls upon people to obey it, and put it into practice. 1 Peter 4:11 says, “If any man speak, let him speak as of the oracles of God.” Prophecy is proclaiming God’s revealed word to His people or to non-Christians (1 Cor. 14:24-25). The best definition of the prophetic gift is found in 1 Corinthians 14:3, “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.” Its purpose is to build up believers, challenge them to obedience and comfort them in sorrow.

Now notice *how* we are to prophesy. The one with the prophetic gift is to exercise that gift “in proportion to our faith.” “Proportion” (*analogia*) means “in proportion to, or in agreement with.” Furthermore, “faith” has the definite article. So it may have the idea of “in agreement with the faith.” Jude referred to the body of Christian doctrine as “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3; cf. Gal. 1:23; 3:23). 1 Thessalonians 5 says, “Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things...” (vv. 19-21). We are not to despise those who say they have a word from God, but we are not to be gullible either. We are to “prove” or “test” such proclamations, comparing what is preached with what the Word of God says. If a man has a word from God, it will not contradict the rest of Scripture. But according to some commentators (Murray), the idea of proportion is the preponderant one. The Prophet who speaks God’s word is not to go beyond what God has given him to speak. Nor is he to withhold any truth from the people. Both interpretations are relevant.

¹ In 2 Corinthians 12:12 Paul says, “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.” Hebrews 2:4 says that God bore witness to the apostles “both with signs and wonders, with various miracles....”

Oh, how we need men who are called to preach and enabled with the gift of prophecy to use this gift! That is what Paul exhorted Timothy to do in 2 Timothy 4:2-4: “Preach the Word; be diligent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but, after their own lusts, shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; they shall turn away their ears from the truth.” Is there someone here today that has been called to preach, and yet you still haven’t answered the call?

The next speaking gift we will consider this morning is:

B. Teaching – In the last of v.7 Paul mentions the gift of teaching. The office of teaching differs from the prophetic. The teacher is to expound the meaning of that which has already been revealed. His work is directed particularly to the understanding. Teaching involves the ongoing process of systematically taking people from one point to another in their understanding of the Word of God. Acts 2:41 says that the early church “continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine.”

Paul was an excellent teacher. The epistle to the Romans shows his genius at systematically imparting truth. Jesus certainly had the ability. Luke 24:27 tells us that as He walked on the road to Emmaus with two disciples “he expounded unto them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself.” He was especially gifted in using stories & parables to teach spiritual truth. I believe all elders or pastors should have the gift of teaching. In fact, 1 Timothy 3:2 says that elders are to be “apt to teach.” They must have the gift of teaching. The primary function of a pastor is to interpret Scripture so it is understandable and then systematically instruct his congregation with it. It’s not unusual for a pastor to be both a teacher and a preacher, but he must at least have the gift of teaching as a basic requirement for being an elder. We need others who have the gift of teaching in Sunday School, and in other areas. We have many fine lay teachers in our church.

Paul says how this gift is to be exercised, “in teaching.” The one with the gift of teaching is to teach! There is no other way to develop this gift, or to determine if you have this gift.

Teaching is somewhat like swimming. Just as you must commit yourself to the water to learn to swim, so you must learn to teach by teaching.

Try as soon as possible to communicate to someone else a truth that you have learned. When you learn something from a sermon, tell two or three other people at the earliest possible opportunity. You may discover that you have the gift of teaching.

C. Exhortation – Paul mentions the gift of exhortation in v.8. Whereas prophecy proclaims the truth, exhorting calls for a right response to the truth. And as teaching is directed to the understanding, so is exhortation to the heart, conscience, and will. The Christian needs someone who will give encouragement and exhortation along the way of their spiritual development. It could involve a call & encouragement to trust more in the Lord and walk by faith. The Christian is to be ready with the word of advice, the word of experience, the word of testimony of blessings received from the Lord, etc.

The broad scope of the ministry of exhortation is reflected in 1 Th. 5:14, where Paul says, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak...” Thus, exhortation could involve encouraging people to stop sinning and start living righteously. If someone is fainthearted and afraid, you need to remind him that God is in control and that since no enemy is greater than He, His victory is guaranteed. If you’re weak and

defeated, then someone needs to come to you and say, “Let me encourage you to take your eyes off your problems and focus them on the Lord; be strong in the Lord and the power of His might.” The word also refers to comforting in times of trouble or sorrow. So if you find someone in sorrow, you might gently encourage him by saying, “Our God is a God of victory, and your sorrow will be turned someday into joy” (cf. John 16:20-22).

Bible commentator Donald Barnhouse told of young girl who was taking skating lessons from an experienced skater. As the young student was skating around, every now & then she would begin to stumble & fall. But her teacher was always close by, and she would quickly come over & keep her from falling.

Even so in the church today we need people with the gift of exhortation & comfort, who can come to the side of someone who is falling due to fear, or discouragement, or temptation. They have a special ability to say just the right words to keep them from falling.

Do you think you may have that gift? Can you encourage people with a phone call, a visit, or a special card? Can you exhort a backsliding Christian to return to the Lord and His Church? Can you encourage someone who seems down with a well-timed & sincere complement? I believe our secretary, Anne Cizek, has this gift as expressed through her cards and emails.

If you have this gift, Paul once again says that you are to use it. You are needed in the Body of Christ. Get involved in our visitation program. Volunteer to be a group leader in Sunday School. Keep up with who is on our prayer list, and take steps to encourage or comfort those who have special needs.

D. Leading – According to the last of v.8, some have the gift of leading.² “Leads” is from *proistemi*, literally “to stand before.” So it means to be at the head of, rule, direct, manage, to oversee. It involves the multiple skills of organizing, administrating, and motivating people to accomplish a task. When you have a group of people, someone needs to stand up, take some initiative, and give direction to the group. Otherwise, nothing will be accomplished.

God has designed the church to have leaders. Heb. 13:7, 17 mentions the leaders of the church. Furthermore, in Acts 6 the apostles were certainly the leaders of the church, but they requested that the church find other men to carry on the administrative task of providing for the widows. So the church needs lay leaders, and not just paid staff leaders. There are not enough hours in the day for me to lead every aspect of the ministry of the church. All church leaders would be included here if they are gifted to be leaders.

If people tend to look to you for leadership, then you probably have this gift. And if you have this gift, we need you to accept leadership responsibilities in our committees, organizations, and other ministries. Right now we need a leader for our women’s ministry. Ladies, has God enabled you to be a leader? If so, you need to consider this ministry opportunity.

Furthermore, Paul tells us in the last of v.8 that they are to lead with diligence. The word refers to eagerness, intense effort and determination. I believe this is reflected in v.11, “not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” If the workers are to have diligence, then the leaders must set the example.

II. CONSIDER IF YOU HAVE ONE OF THE ACTION GIFTS

A. Serving – The Greek word translated “ministry” in v.7 is *diakonia*. The word was often used of those who wait upon the need of others, as a waiter provides service to those who

² The gift of leading is the same as the gift of governments mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:28.

are dining. It's a common word in the New Testament that is used more than seventy-five times for various dimensions of serving. Here, "ministry" refers to service of any kind, in word or deed.³ The gift of ministry is a support gift of practical help or service.

The flexibility of the term is apparent from 1 Cor. 12:5 where Paul speaks of "diversities of ministries." God may call you to help us minister to physical needs. I believe deacons should have the gift of service. There are many support services in the church where this gift can be exercised. We need ushers, nursery workers, grass cutters, building & grounds workers, class secretaries, committee workers, and so forth.

The church is dependent on the helpers. If people with the gifts of helps or ministry don't use their gifts, the church has to find other people who will perform the basic but important tasks that keep a church functioning properly. At times we end up paying people for what could and should be done by people with the gift of service.

I have observed quite a few people in our church with the gift of service. They often volunteer when something needs to be done. You learn that they are the ones you can count on to help out.

So if you have the gift of serving, your church needs you to serve.

B. Giving – Paul mentions the gift of giving in v.8. "Giving" (*metadidomi*) is from a word which means "share with" or "to impart one's earthly possessions to another."

How do you know if you have this gift? First, you have a God-given inclination to give. Whenever you hear or see a need, you tend to what to respond by giving to meet that need. Furthermore, a person with the gift of giving is usually blessed with an ability to acquire money. As they give, God just blesses them with more.

The person who has this gift is to do so "with liberality." The word has two basic meanings; sincerity or generosity. The former meaning would refer to giving with single-mindedness of motive and purpose. Giving must not be with the ulterior motives of securing influence and advantage for oneself. Such giving is to be without public show. The man who is not willing to give unless his name is carved in wood or engraved in stone has not understood the spirit of Christ that gives without thought of return. The latter meaning, liberality, would also apply, but perhaps less so. The one who has the gift of giving is by nature generous.

I thank God for those who have the gift of giving. If you have that gift, then use it. If your heart is prompted to give generously when needs arise, and you can do it with an overwhelming sense of joy, then you can know you have that gift.

Last of all, some have the special gift of:

C. Showing Mercy – This gift is mentioned in v.8. This is having pity and compassion toward people in misery – the poor, the downtrodden, the imprisoned, and others who are faced with hardships. You find people with the gift participating in jail ministries, hospital visitation, and rescue missions for the homeless. They will work in the church or community food closet. Jesus had all the spiritual gifts, and He certainly showed mercy and compassion to the poor and needy.

But notice how you are to exercise that gift. Paul says in the last of v.8 that this is to be done with cheerfulness. If you're going to minister to people who are miserable, you had better not be miserable yourself while you're doing it. One should carry sunshine, not gloom, to those in need. You want to encourage them in their misery, not add to it! Often times the work of

³ It is equivalent to what is referred to as "helps" in 1 Cor. 12:28.

mercy is disagreeable and so it is liable to be done grudgingly and in a mechanical way. Nothing affords more consolation to the distressed than the sight of helpers full of cheerfulness. Such people need some good cheer.

This reminds me of a story of a certain layman who went to his pastor. He said, "I want to serve God. Tell me what I should do." So the pastor suggested that he go down to the rescue mission & volunteer there. He went there & said to the superintendent of the rescue mission, "I want to serve God. Tell me what I can do?" So he suggested that he go out to the sidewalk & invite people to the worship service that was about to take place. Well, he had a sour disposition and he began to confront people with a demanding attitude, telling people they ought to come into the rescue mission for the service. Not surprisingly, no one accepted his invitation. Finally, someone helped him see what was wrong with his approach as he said, "No thank you. I have enough problems of my own." [Barnhouse, pp. 58-59].

So as you show mercy to people in need, to people who are troubled, do so with cheerfulness. If you are going to show mercy by giving to meet a need, do so cheerfully, not grudgingly.

Conclusion: The issue isn't what your gift is; it's what you *do* with it. Your eternal commendation is not going to be whether you had the same effect that Billy Graham did on the world. Your eternal reward is going to be based on whether you maximized the gift God designed for you to use (cf. Matt. 25:14-30). It's going to be based on how faithful you have been to exercise your gift in the right way. So give heed to Paul's exhortation to Timothy, "stir up the gift of God which is in you" (2 Timothy 1:6). During the invitation will you dedicate yourself to serving God & others by employing your spiritual gift? Perhaps you will come forward & let me know of your willingness to work in a particular ministry.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 4, "God's Discipline" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); John MacArthur, Jr., *A Living Sacrifice: Study Notes on Romans 12:1-8* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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