

Your Spiritual Gifts

Romans 12:3-8

Introduction

In chapter 12 Paul's mind and heart turns to the subject of service. Paul wants the Christian to put learning into practice. Paul wants our doctrine to become duty. We sometimes misunderstand the word 'duty'. We think of it as a drab obligation or religious requirement. Not so—says Paul. Paul has already said, 'I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God' (v.1) that is based on God's mercies; our motive is love generated by God's mercies; we serve Christ and each other not to obtain God's mercies but rather because we have obtained and have become beneficiaries of God's mercies.

Paul uses the illustration of a sacrifice on the altar (vv.1-2) and now provides another illustration; we are members of the body (vv.3-8). Service in the Body of Christ begins with personal dedication (vv.1-2) and then continues with an honest evaluation of the spiritual gifts that one possesses (v.3). We have to approach the subject of service with both an understanding of sacrifice and self-examination. Paul asks that we think about ourselves—in the right way—with the right motive and perspective. Paul encourages us to be honest in our estimation of ourselves and in our abilities and gifts that God has given to us; in order to serve one another.

Later in the chapter Paul will use other illustrations; we are members of a family (vv.9-13); and we are soldiers in a battle (vv.14-21).

Our Spiritual Mind-set (v.3a)

Romans 12:3 (NKJV) *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly,*

Paul in effect says; as we speak about spiritual service and before we speak about spiritual gifts, let's have a little talk about our spiritual mind-set; our attitude.

Paul knew that confusion concerning spiritual gifts and roles could cause confusion, misunderstanding, confusion in thinking, in life and ministry. Paul wants to liberate us from this confusion and set us free to serve God with the specific gifts that are given; and serve God's people in the role intended.

What does Paul mean when he writes; "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think".

Christians make two primary mistakes; they think to highly or too little of themselves.

How do we do that? We fail to have an honest evaluation of our spiritual gifts. What is your ministry? Where is your place of service in the Body of Christ?

Warren Wiersbe writes; "It is not wrong for a Christian to recognize gifts in his own life and in the lives of others. What is wrong is the tendency to have a false evaluation of ourselves. Nothing causes more damage in a local church than a believer who overrates himself and tries to perform a ministry that he cannot do." Wiersbe makes another note that sometimes the opposite is true, people under-value themselves. Both attitudes are wrong (see p.555).

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Paul writes; “I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you”; Paul’s message is to everyone. No one is left out. All are included. Every single person in the Body of Christ; born again by the Holy Spirit; receives a spiritual gift; perhaps clusters of gifts or groupings of gifts; in order to fulfill God’s plan. You should despise your spiritual gift. Think highly—but not too highly!

The word highly translates the word *hyperphronein*—*to think above (only here in the Greek New Testament)*. A similar idea is found in verse 16; “Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.”

We as believers can call for a humility check up! Peter writes (1Peter 5:5) “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble’”.

How ought one to think of one’s self? Paul writes “. . .*but to think soberly*”.

Sophroneo occurs six times in the New Testament and its root word some 30 times. It was used in Mark 5:15 of a man who was healed of demon possession and then came into his “right mind”. In 2 Corinthians 5:13 it translates to the opposite of insane—it is connected to prayer and watching in 1 Peter 4:7 and in Philippians 2:5-8 it emphasizes an attitude of humility.

To think soberly includes the idea of think carefully, free from intoxicants; we might say balanced, sane, in one’s right mind. In order to think about yourself wisely, accurately, you must make a balanced evaluation of yourself and your abilities!

For the person who says; “I think I might be the next Billy Graham” get a grip.

Every person is important to the Lord. Every person is meaningful and significant in the Kingdom of God. Paul will spell out his reasons with crystal clarity:

Our Measure Of Faith (v.3b)

as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Our gifts, talents abilities, resources, are all given by God. When Paul speaks of ‘a measure of faith’ the context seems to mean a working kind of faith. I think the meaning includes that God has given to each—both gifts and abilities and the confidence to exercise those gifts and abilities.

Paul speaks of a measure of faith (v.3) and a proportion of faith (v.6); which means both the spiritual gift and the power to exercise that gift for the task at hand.

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Since you did not create yourself; and you did not create your spiritual gifts, you have no right to boast in yourself or your ability.

James 1:17; “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”

I Corinthians 4:7; “For who makes you differ from one another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

Each is given a ‘measure’ not the full measure—no person has the full measure of anything!

I once heard a self-proclaimed apostle/prophet boast he possessed every single spiritual gift that Paul possessed!

How then could he ignore Paul’s statement in Ephesians 4:7; ‘But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift’.

The Bible teaches each one is given a measure of faith (here) a measure of grace (according to the measure of Christ (Eph.4:7).

Since that is the case there is no such thing as an ungifted Christian. No one person has a monopoly on any gift or ability. No single believer has been left out or omitted by God. From God’s perspective each believer has obtained a gifting by God in order to accomplish God’s will for that believer and the church and the world! There is no room for pride or arrogance or conceit in the Body of Christ. Such thinking is insane. Paul suggests that conceit is a kind of spiritual insanity!

Genuine believers are all a part of one body.

Our Ministry Of Spiritual Gifts (vv.4-8)

4For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,

The word ‘function’ is the Greek word *praxis* (root *prasso*; used some 36 times what we do or practice; deeds).

5so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

The body speaks of interdependence.

We all know the human body is made up of complex interdependent systems. Blood, bones, muscles.

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We have 206 bones in our human skeletal system. We are an engineering marvel. Our bones are rigid so that they provide a support for the body's organs and tissues, and our bones serve as protection for our brain, lungs, heart and spinal chord. In the book "The Human Body: Accident or Design" the author (pp.19-21) points out Bones act as levers enabling muscles to move the body. They provide a reservoir of essential minerals. Bones contain 99% of the calcium, 88% of the phosphorus, plus many trace elements needed by the body. In addition to support storage, bones act as chemical factories to produce red blood cells, certain white blood cells, and platelets in their marrow. When a bone is broken, it immediately starts to repair itself. Engineers are continually trying to develop strong light weight structural materials; but have yet to devise a substance that grows continuously, lubricates itself, requires no shut down when damaged.

How many of us think about our liver? It is three pounds and is larger than our heart! This amazing chemical processing facility performs at least 500 known functions within our bodies. It is such a complicated chemical factory that biochemists have not even remotely approached developing a machine of any size which accomplishes a fraction of the same functions. The liver stores vitamins, detoxifies poisons, stabilizes the body's blood -sugar levels, builds enzymes and more. The liver filters enough blood in a single year to fill 23 milk trucks. The liver also plays an important role in our digestive process. Digestion could not take place without the interrelated functions of our liver, mouth, tongue, intestines, stomach and pancreas. If these organs are not all working in perfect concert, we will have major (and potentially fatal) problems.

We are one body. We are designed by God's Holy Spirit. We are made to function in health. The Holy Spirit's job includes, advocating, convicting, drawing people to Christ, teaching, sealing, guiding, interceding, empowering believers. The Holy Spirit's job is to glorify Jesus.

The Church exists to glorify Jesus, empower believers and then become an extension of ministry to the watching world.

6Having 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;

In the English language gift can mean a special talent or ability like playing an instrument, or an aptitude for languages, or profound artistic expression. Or it can mean something given without charge or obligation—freely—like a present on a special occasion.

Those definitions sometimes cloud or color our judgment when we think of Paul's use of the term. Clearly God has gifted some people with extraordinary talents.

But Paul speaks of spiritual gifts (*charisma*). The emphasis in the New Testament is not on the ability or abilities themselves; but rather on how they function in the ministries (services) of the church.

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Paul speaks of gifts ‘according to the grace that is given to us’—this means that gifts are given when we come to know and experience the grace of God; this is part of our heritage in Christ.

We are given gifts. We are given tasks. We are given purpose and meaning and significance. We are given a special gift or gifts to accomplish those tasks.

Charisma was a gift from God—not a natural talent.

What makes the gift spiritual? The origin of the gift is the Holy Spirit. The gift is free in so much that it is given by the Holy Spirit to be used in the Body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are not simply meant to be catalogued or stored or published; but they are meant to be used in service for the Body of Christ.

Paul’s admonition; “let us use them”;

The Holy Spirit is the origin of the gift. The gift is given for service. The Holy Spirit empowers believers by creating ministries—opportunities to serve. Each believer contributes to the growth—both in numbers and maturity—to the church. The spiritual gifts are tools we use to carry out the function of those ministries. The function of the gift is the service of the gift.

Paul’s main interest in his letters were to teach and guide and help grow the body of Christ.

Paul’s list includes:

- Prophesying (v.6)
- Serving (v.7)
- Teaching (v.7b)
- Encouraging (v.8a)
- Giving (v.8b)
- Leading (v.8c)
- Showing kindness (v.8d)

The list is not meant to be exhaustive or complete. There are four lists of spiritual gifts given in the New Testament; including Ephesians 4:11; and I Corinthians 12:8-10; and then again in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30.

In Ephesians 4:11 the emphasis seems to be on spiritual leaders as gifts to the church; and in Corinthians the presence of what some have called the extraordinary or miraculous gifts.

Some believers teach that the four gifts of apostleship and prophecy, speaking and interpreting tongues and the working of miracles were for another time; the time between Jesus’ ascension and the death of the last apostle. These people are called cessationists; because they believe those gifts have in fact ceased and play no role in the post-apostolic church.

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I do not embrace their view. Most who identify themselves as cessationists are reluctant to dismiss all gifts and have no problem believing that serving, teaching, encouraging, giving (especially giving!) leading and showing kindness or mercy have an important role and application now.

People fall into four main camps: those who believe that the sign gifts or miracle gifts were restricted to the apostolic age; those who believe in the continuation of all the gifts. A third camp has been identified as a kind of in-between-camp—of being open but cautious. The open but cautious group are willing to entertain the idea of the supernatural sign gifts but express a kind of caution or skepticism—but not hostility.

Still others fall into a kind of coagulated camp of picking and choosing that perhaps some of the four continue while others have ceased.

Whatever view—those who embrace Christianity are willing to concede that Paul believed the spiritual gifts were given to promote health and unity and proper function in the Body of Christ. Did Paul believe spiritual gifts could be abused? The answer is yes.

But let's have a quick look at what Paul includes on this list:

Prophecy

What does Paul mean by prophecy? In the Old Testament prophecy was the gift of God whereby a person was called to proclaim and sometimes explain the will of God. Sometimes the proclamation included subjects of the past, or present or future. In the New Testament the gift of prophecy seems more related to truth than events of the future. The New Testament Prophet speaks of Jesus, and speaks concerning the things revealed by Jesus. The Prophet edifies, comforts, exhorts, reproves, rebukes, in all righteousness. Paul writes; “He that prophesies speaks to men to edification and exhortation and comfort” (I Cor.14:3).

It seems to make sense that whatever Paul means by prophecy that it must include telling the truth about Jesus; and how can a person do that if they don't even know Christ?

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

‘diakonia’ or ministry; the word was used of serving and servers; this is the practical expression of service. I think it must retain the supernatural element—this is the supernatural ability to serve others; to minister, to aid, to assist, to build up. There are people who do not have simply a willingness to help or the ability to help, but a supernatural gifting. Jesus speaks of giving food or drink in his name, visiting the prisoner (Matt. 10:42); but Paul again says “as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

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

Conclusion

When I was an assistant Pastor at Calvary of Albuquerque; I had a number of different duties and tasks. One of the things Skip asked me to do was maintain the heating and air conditioning of our sanctuary. I could not figure out the heating and air conditioning controls to save my life. In frustration I told Skip, get somebody else. If that means I lose my job, I lose my job. I refused to operate in a gift and calling where I had little skill or ability.

Our gifts are supposed to be a source of freedom not fear. The last thing we need in our church are spiritual puppets who are bullied or intimidated into roles or gifts that we quite simply do not possess.

What is Paul's point? We as Christians are called to evaluate ourselves, know ourselves—well. We are to come to grips with who we are. We are to understand and evaluate those gifts. We are not to over evaluate or under evaluate. We are to be wise and accurate.

What has God called you to do? What contribution are you to make? A Pastor a Teacher? A butcher a baker a candlestick maker?

Warning: If you think too highly of yourself—you may attempt too much and fail. If you think to little—you may never be able to make the contribution to the Body of Christ that God intends.

Philippians 2:3-4; "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (4) Let each one of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.