

# We Have Gifts!

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Romans 12:6-8

"WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

These wonderful lines about our ascended and exalted Savior and Lord Jesus, quote from Psalm 68 by Paul in Ephesians 4, sets the tone of our new covenant age – the age of the Lord, of the Spirit, and of freedom.

And with his triumph, he pours out favors in his train and gives gifts to his church!

Paul now brings us into this gift room in these three verses.

Here are only seven gifts listed. And they are meant for the good of the church. Someone has said:

“Spiritual gifts are not toys with which to play; they are tools of the Spirit with which to do the Lord’s work effectively.”

As we look at these verses, we want to begin with the first of four points on how gifts are of God.

We really should not divide the gifts from the giver. Paul doesn’t.

So our first point is the

## **1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE GIFT LISTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

In Romans, Paul has all the gifts coming from God the Father. In Ephesians, as we already mentioned, the Son gives gifts from on high. And in the fullest treatment in 1 Corinthians, the Holy Spirit is the One who distributes as He pleases.

So see the Trinitarian nature of these gifts. It is not one or the other. It is not just the Spirit, not just the Son, not just the Father.

In 1 Peter 4.11 is a list very similar to Romans 12.

But it is striking that love comes first, where here it is somewhat reversed.

Humility and love are always the two pieces of bread for the sandwich the gifts. For love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, (1Cor 13:4).

So these gifts of God function in the body, for the body, to the building up and not tearing down of the saints.

This leads to our second point:

## **2. THE SETTING OF THE GIFTS, or, THE GRACE OF GIFTS**

The gifts are found in the larger landscape of the gospel of grace. It is among those who have been redeemed by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us.

The greatest gift is the Son who was not withheld by the Father to save us from our sins and gives us everlasting life – Romans 8, Ephesians 2.8-9

The grace of a new life is greater than the gifts which follow. The fruit of the Spirit and the armor of God are greater than the gifts. Think of it this way: a Christian is to have all the virtues, but Christians do not have all the gifts! And, vice versa, people can have the gifts of the Spirit and die and go to hell, but those who are new creatures by conversion can never die. Balaam in the OT, and Judas in the NT, had gifts, but went to hell.

Jesus warned there will be those say, Lord, Lord, did we not exercise these gifts, and He will say to them, depart from me, I never knew you!

But this is not meant to diminish the gifts of the Spirit.

For all true Christians have the Spirit. If any have not the Spirit of Christ, they are not His! It is impossible to be a Christian and not have the Holy Spirit as the pledge of God in your life, the firstfruits of heaven! You are adopted!

And John writes that all God's children have an anointing.

So in a profound sense, all Christians are charismatic – that is the root for anointing. Not all the gifts abide today, as some were foundational and have ceased.

But others are abiding and meant for the building up of the church upon the once for all foundation.

This means that all believers are gifted. All have at least one or more of these edifying, grace-given gifts.

Not all are officers in the church, nor are all are ordained. But all are gifted. John Calvin said: "There is none so poor in the church of Christ who may not impart to us something of value."

So let us see then how these gifts work. They are of God, point one. They are found in the midst of God's saved people, point two. How do they function?

### **3. THE CONTOURS OF THE GIFTS AND HOW THEY ARE TO FUNCTION**

Clearly Paul has a practical angle here when he urges these gifts to be used. He begins with "each of us is to exercise them".

As we said, there are seven in all.

And we can divide them further into two types: there are word- or speaking-gifts, and there are serving- or mercy-gifts.

Here is prophecy, and here is service,

Prophecy, teaching, exhorting – all are about the Word and the truth and helping others to live according to God's authority in thought and life.

And then service, giving, leading, showing mercy. These provide the helps to serve.

Let us look at these briefly then.

Paul begins with prophecy, in accord to the proportion of faith, or in agreement with faith. It is similar to 1 Cor. 14:37, of keeping within the bounds of apostolic teaching.

Now some, like Calvin, would say this is preaching. But most have not followed him there. This is supernatural revelation given to prophecy directly from God. And not all had that gift, and that gift has ceased today.

The next word, service, comes from the word for Deacons. Service can actually be in the Word or in hands-on serving. In Acts 6, the teaching and waiting on the tables of the widows was called a service.

Serving the physical needs of the people of God is being the hand of God.

The next word, teaching, is the root for our English word, didactic. This is instruction. Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16 says the inspired Word of God is profitable first for instruction. That has the idea of informing our minds, our thoughts, our ideas, our convictions, our outlook on life.

Teachers are so important to us, aren't they? How can we be Word-centered believers without instruction?

Moving on then to exhortation, this is the root for the word "Paraclete", the Holy Spirit as Helper. It means literally to be called to one's side so as to aid them, comfort them, encourage them.

If teaching is addressed to the understanding, then exhortation addresses the conscience and feelings. The one is the ingredients, and the others is the oven, the power.

This word could have the idea as well of consoling, reconciling, and counselling.

We come then to number five: the one who gives is to do so with singleness of mind, or with simplicity.

Surely the work of the deacons is here, to give with generosity, without grudging; with sincerity, without ulterior motives.

But we dare not limit this to the deacons. Others have this gift of means and generosity, and the rich are to be stirred in this especially.

Number six then is to “lead”. It means literally to rule, and possibly has in mind ruling elders.

But it can also have the sense of presiding over something such as the giving of contributions and finances like a Trustee in the church.

Paul’s application is let them do so with haste, directness, diligence.

Then seventh and last: mercy is to be exercised, with good cheer.

The Lord loves a cheerful giver!

This is great attribute with which to end – God who is merciful to us, means we are to be merciful as well.

“To show mercy is to care for anybody who is in distress, whether aliens, orphans and widows, or the handicapped, the sick and the dying.” John Stott

We think of ourselves so much and easily complain of our condition. But when we think of others around us, with such hardships greater than our own, this should move us out of our own lives to serve them.

So this leads to an important question. How do I discern my gifts?

Here are a couple bullet-points to guide us:

- a. Your gifts will be manifest to others as well as to yourself. You are not alone in this endeavor. It is in the body that the gifts emerge.
- b. Seek the gifts, with diligence and care. We should desire the good things of God, right?

- c. We have already said that prophecy being the very mouthpiece of God, has ceased with speaking in tongues (another Word-gift).
- d. But teaching, instructing, exhorting. All Christians should know the gospel enough to tell others. Exhort is more motivational, encouraging, moving people to respond to the truth.
- e. Others are gifted in the quiet but powerful service to others, laboring, giving to the needy, cheerfully carrying the burdens of others. All of us are to bear one another's burdens; but specially so.
- f. Study these gifts – which one or ones have you? Lay your life next to these patterns. Do not say, which do I like best; but which do I have? Look honestly, ask others to counsel and assist you and pray with you about these matters.
- g. Then the most important thing – is put them into practice! Implement them. You are commanded here to exercise your gift in a specific way. Giving needs liberality, leading needs diligence, showing mercy needs cheerfulness. If we were to combine these things – we could summarize them by four words: **DO IT, with firmness!**
- h. I would add here the two qualities already mentioned: humility and love. These are like the oars in the water. Gifts serve the body, and pride on the one side blows its own horn, and loving only yourself will warp the best gifts.

Now let us close on the effects of these gifts, shall we? Or,

#### **4. THE FRUIT OF THE GIFTS –**

- a. The church should be a well-taught and encouraged body. We should be a learned body; an exhorted, and warmly inspired body, who are engaged in the truth, in the Word of God, and in the gospel.
- b. Second, the church is to be a well-served and cared-for body, looking out for each other and assisting one another in our needs. The church is a hospital. All of us are on our way to perfect resurrection health! But there are struggles and trials and harmful things along the way. A special eye is to be out for those least in our midst.

We are to be so giving, Christ-centered, other-oriented, that we will be accused of being fanatical at times. Paul teaching five hours a day in Ephesus, six days a week! Barnabas selling his land and putting all the proceeds at the feet of the apostles! The woman pouring out such costly perfume is accused of great extravagance! Have you ever been accused of being extravagant in loving, serving, blessing others?

And yet, these are only the tools in the toolbox. What really matters is in the next paragraph!

See you next time!